

Doctor's Silence - RotS AU

Jade-Max

Star Wars

Complete



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Summary

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Sequel to "A New Path to Follow" - Padmé, the head Doctor assigned to the Jedi Temple and the secret wife of Anakin Skywalker, struggles with the revelation that the secrets she and her husband have been trying to keep will shortly be exposed as their love takes on the most fundamental form...

Chapter 1

Disclaimer: Star Wars belongs to Disney and is the intellectual property of George Lucas; he created the sandbox. I'm making no money off of this and am simply destroying the sandcastles.

Title: Doctor's Silence

Author: Jade_Max

Genre: Romance, Adventure (RotS AU)

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Summary: Sequel to **A New Path to Follow** — Padmé, the head Doctor assigned to the Jedi Temple and the secret wife of Anakin Skywalker, struggles with the revelation that the secrets she and her husband have been trying to keep will shortly be exposed as their love takes on the most fundamental form...

Doctor's Silence

Chapter 1

Confident hands smoothed down the front of her lab coat and gently patted her hair down before she stepped through the double doors leading into the inner most room, overlooking the main heart of Coruscant.

The room was circular, interspaced evenly with large, comfortable chairs fitted specifically to the beings occupying them. Several of the chairs were empty, betraying the grim toll this war had taken on the Jedi and the Jedi Council thus far. She had two Masters, five Knights and ten young Padawans in various stages of recuperation. As she stepped into the room, she felt a twinge in her stomach and prayed the nausea would pass quickly.

"Welcome you are, Doctor Naberrie." Yoda's greeting was accompanied with a smile. "Your patient, is she well?"

Doctor Padmé Naberrie — secretly Skywalker — inclined her head to the Master, slipping her hands into the pockets of her lab coat. "She's doing much better now that she's no longer on Dantooine, Master Yoda. The baby shows a high midicholrian count, but is suffering from a cold that will keep him in the infirmary until it loses its hold. While his high fever can be a concern, it also means he's fighting the infection. Overall, after what they've been through, they're in pretty good shape."

"The mother's to have no contact with the child, Doctor." Jedi Master Shaak Ti's voice was even, but carried a note of warning. "That child is now in the care of the temple."

Padmé's hand clenched in her jacket pocket. Of all the duties she'd assumed as the head physician at the Jedi Temple, this was the one she disliked the most. Her stomach churned, as if in empathy for the sorrow the mother would feel. "After five years, Master, I believe I know the terms. The boy will be placed in the nursery once he's well enough to be taken off the monitors. Cyan is well aware of the restrictions concerning her and her baby."

"Her baby no longer." Yoda's tone was mild in reproof. "Cared for, the child will be. Taught the ways of the Force. A future the boy, and Knight Long, would have not, without your assistance."

"I'm glad to be of service, Master Yoda." She swallowed, her throat working against the sudden, almost violent urge to lose what little breakfast she'd been able to stomach. "If you'll excuse me?"

"Well are you, Doctor?"

Padmé managed a smile, somehow holding her composure. "I believe I may have caught what the boy has, Master. I'll be fine."

Mace Windu rose from his chair and crossed the room, half bowing to her before offering his arm. "If I may, Doctor? We can't afford to have to falling ill with so many patients to treat."

Padmé accepted his arm with a show of reluctance, but was grateful for his help. "I really am fine, Mace."

Mace waited until the council chamber doors had closed before taking a critical look at her. "You're flushed yet pale and your eyes... Do you feel faint?"

"Just a touch dizzy. It's nothing."

"I think Anja—"

"Mace." She cut him off with a forced laugh as they headed for the Infirmary and her room. "I'm alright, I promise. The flu baby Long has isn't one I was vaccinated against. Lana assured me that the symptoms, while irritating and disquieting, would only last for a few days at best. The virus is most dangerous in children." She grinned. "And, if you hadn't noticed, I'm not exactly a child anymore."

Mace appeared to accept her explanation, albeit reluctantly. "True. Has Mik returned from the Clone ward yet?"

"Not yet. She's due back tomorrow."

Mace stopped outside the infirmary doors and turned his intense look on her. "Promise me something?"

Padmé rolled her eyes, knowing what was coming. Ever since his treatment he'd been overprotective of her, claiming that she was an asset they couldn't risk losing. It had translated into an almost father/daughter kind of relationship, though she doubted Mace knew it. "If it's in my power, Mace, you know I will."

His half-smile appeared. "Good. Then you'll have Mik give you a thorough work up when she's back."

Padmé squeezed his arm. “You’re worrying for nothing; I’m rarely ever sick.”

“That’s why you should get checked out. And no more missions for a while; the children’s ward has been asking for you again.”

“Is that an order, Master Windu?”

“Should I make it one?”

Padmé chuckled. “If you feel it’s necessary. Besides, Anakin’s just been sent off with Obi-Wan to search for Grievous; who would go with me on a mission? Most of the other Jedi have Padawans or are waiting for the youngling selection ceremony.”

Mace conceded the point with a nod. “Be well, Doctor. May the Force be with you.”

“And you, Master Windu.”

She shook her head in amusement as he walked away, wondering if he’d ever admit that he was worrying about her like a parent. She doubted it. It was kind of nice to know she had a friend on the council. She stepped into the Infirmary and looked around.

Things had changed since she’d first arrived five years ago to do the emergency surgery on Mace.

Padmé’d had them tear out each section, piece by piece, and replaced them with state of the art — at the time — equipment and facilities. She now had a proper clean room for research, surgery and prep rooms, a visitation area, five individual bunks for critical patients once they emerged from bacta and five tanks of the newest models.

The walls had been repainted a more relaxing light blue tone in all of the rooms and were painted yearly to keep the color fresh. The floors were now gratings over top of siphon troughs to prevent the floor from becoming slick with fluids. The troughs fed into a basin outside the temple that was then recycled and purified to remove any contaminants of the bio hazard waste. If viable, it could be converted into neutral plasma for patients needing blood.

She’d also expanded the staff. In addition to the Junior Healer Anja, whose Master had been lost to Grievous the year Padmé had been appointed to the temple, she had Mik and Lana flown back from the front lines to compliment her department. Cordé was technically a part of the staff but divided her time between the recovery ICU wing at the main hospital and the Temple. Mik did the same, having grown quite fond of the Clones in her time on the front lines, and visited those that were in recuperation phases whenever she could.

Padmé had to admit it was nice having help in the wing and Anja was soon to take her final trials, both as a Jedi healer and a ticketed Doctor for the Syndicate. If Padmé had any pull at all, the girl would get the more-than-deserved recognition.

She spared the new diagnostic equipment and the database it was connected to barely a glance as she headed for the research lab and the work she’d left in Cordé’s able hands in her absence. She was pleasantly surprised to find a stack of data cards with a note from Cordé indicating that the observations they’d had in the last few months were ground breaking. She placed the data cards in a nearby container, careful not to mix their order, and placed the container in her pocket. A datapad went into the other before she left the lab and moved across the hall to peek into Lana’s self-declared domain.

The children's ICU room smelled of powder and flowers, bringing a smile to Padmé's face as she spied Lana settled in the corner, rocking back and forth in a chair, her eyes on the baby in her arms. A faint, musical humming sound was audible through the steady beeping and buzzing of various monitors.

"Lana."

Lana looked up from the baby in her arms, a smile on her face despite a shadow in her eyes. "He's just beautiful, Padmé. I can't believe Cyan doesn't want to see him; she won't even give him a name."

"Would you if you knew you had to give him away once he's better?" Padmé's question was soft.

"I'd want to give him something, even if it was just his name." Lana rose to her feet and moved back to the high crib along one wall. She placed the baby inside before turning to her friend. "How can Cyan be so accepting of something that's so obviously wrong?"

Padmé smiled in understanding. "It seems wrong to you or I, but does that really make it wrong? The Jedi have to teach these children from an early age that forming any kind of attachments is to open yourself to weakness; to temptation. It blinds one to clarity of thought and purpose and puts the value of one human or alien life above the value of many. To the Jedi and their code, it's wrong to nurture a strong bond between mother and child."

"But Anakin wasn't raised by the temple."

"Anakin's not your typical Jedi." Padmé's smile was secretive. "Anakin also doesn't believe that the council realizes that a Master and Padawan relationship is almost as binding as a Mother and child relationship. They're blind to it even when it's mentioned."

"Then why allow only one Padawan? Wouldn't it make sense to allow several?"

"To what end?"

"Every child needs peers. Surely a Master could handle two or three Padawans and still provide the training required."

Padmé chuckled softly. "Masters focus on one Padawan to ensure that nothing is missed. You work in a children's ward, Lana. Surely you've seen children that don't want to share."

Lana blushed. "That's different."

"How?"

"Whose side are you on?"

"It's not about sides, my friend. It's about personal values, ones I have to put aside when treating the Jedi. Cyan won't allow herself to name her child so that a bond isn't formed between them. Just like I can't let my personal beliefs color the effectiveness and quality of the care I give them. I may not agree with their methods, but it's not my place to judge."

"Any yet we still help them do it."

"You can leave at any time, Lana."

Lana blinked, shocked by the quiet revelation. “Who would take care of the children if I did? Certainly not their parents!”

Padmé grinned. “I take it that means you’re going to stick around?”

Lana’s return smile was chagrined. “I suppose so.”

Padmé made to speak and was hit with a sudden, violent dizzy spell that made her reach for the nearby table to hold herself up. Her vision blackened around the edges, spiraling down to almost non-existent as she teetered on the edge of consciousness for a moment. Focusing on the sight of her hand gripping the table, she tenaciously clung to it, forcing the weakness away even as she felt the first slivers of fear. What if Mace was right and she really was sick?

“Padmé?”

Lana’s concerned tone and the feel of her friend’s cool hand against her flushed cheeks, brought her back to reality. “I’m alright.”

“You don’t look alright. I thought you were going to faint. How do you feel?”

Opening her mouth to reply that she felt fine, Padmé closed it without uttering a sound. She didn’t feel fine. Her stomach was churning, the queasiness of the last few days coming back full tilt.

Lana slid a chair up to the back of her knees and forced her to sit. “Put your head between your knees and take a deep breath.”

Padmé did as she was instructed, closing her eyes to fight off the slightly imbalanced angle of the floor. She still felt a little faint but the nausea appeared to have passed; for the moment.

Lana rubbed her back. “Don’t you think it might be more than little Long’s flu?”

“Name him.”

“Pardon?”

“Name the baby, Lana.” Padmé slowly righted herself. “I’m fine, I promise. I’ll feel better once I’ve had a nap.”

Lana looked to the baby, torn between her friend’s suggestion and Padmé’s condition. “I don’t think it’s my place—”

“If you don’t, the Council will choose a name in session. And we can’t keep calling him baby Long; Cyan won’t have any connection with him.”

Lana frowned but finally nodded. “Ty.”

“Ty?” Padmé arched her eyebrows. “That’s his name? Ty?”

Lana blushed. “It’s my brother’s name.”

“Ty it is then.” Padmé pushed to her feet slowly, careful to avoid another dizzy spell. “I’m going to catch a few hours of sleep. Keep me posted on how Ty is doing. I’ll send a note to the council with his new name.”

Lana nodded, going back to the crib, as Padmé let herself out.

Heading down the hall, Padmé stopped at the last door on the left. Her room; the room that had been hers since the day of Mace's surgery. She keyed open the door, stepping out of her shoes the moment she was over the threshold. She really should head back to her apartment, but she spent so little time there anymore, it was a wonder the Chancellor insisted she keep it.

No matter. She pulled the data disks and the datapad from her lab coat pocket, placing them beside her bed and then removed her coat, hanging it on the back of a nearby chair. She sent off a quick message with the baby's new name to the council chamber before settling on her bunk. She arranged the pillows and then braced herself on them, scooping the datapad and the first disk from the stack.

She didn't feel tired anymore, but rest would do her good. There was no law against catching up on personal research in the meantime. And so she did, reading through the first disk with fascination as Cordé's notes explained the process of midichlorians and the speculation as to why they appeared in such high concentrations to make Jedi. She was disappointed to note that midichlorians couldn't be synthesized; she'd been hoping for otherwise, and that they expired quickly once outside the Jedi blood stream. According to Cordé's notes, the small organisms needed live Jedi blood to survive, almost like a parasite, so they would quickly expire.

Interesting.

As Padmé read through her notes she felt a niggling, insistent pressure at the back of her mind as if her body were trying to tell her something. She ignored it, deliberately loosing herself in work, firmly telling herself she simply had the flu and it would pass.

It was nothing to worry about.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2

“It’s nothing to worry about; I’ve just got a touch of the flu.”

“You’re never sick.”

Padmé waved off the attention Cordé and Mik were insisting upon; she’d almost fainted during one of her reports to the Masters’ Council and they’d been called to assist. The Master Jedi were concerned, as she’d been telling them for two weeks now that she was fine, just a touch sick, but the flu didn’t hang on for two weeks. She was starting to wonder if maybe she had an actual illness. “I’m fine, I swear. Other than the dizzy spells, and the occasional nausea, I’m perfectly alright.”

Cordé pinned her friend with a look that said she didn’t believe her. “For two weeks?”

“Closer to three.” Padmé’s admission was reluctant; she couldn’t lie to that look. “It’s no big deal, Cordé.”

“No big deal? You’ve been showing symptoms of some kind of illness for weeks now and you, a registered Doctor, haven’t bothered to test yourself?”

Padmé shifted uncomfortably in her seat. “It’s nothing.”

Mik shared a pointed look with Cordé. “I think we’ll need to pin her down and test her ourselves. What do you think?”

“I think you’re right.” Cordé’s eyes glittered with repressed anger. “She’s obviously too dense to do it herself.”

“I’m still the head physician in this practice.” Padmé couldn’t keep the irritation out of her voice and drew bemused looks from her staff in response. “If I was really that ill, do you honestly think I’d allow myself to endanger my patient’s safety by not passing my duties off to one of you?”

“That’s not the point.” Cordé’s tone left no room for argument. “We can’t afford to have you sick, Padmé. The younglings, the Masters — all of the Jedi — rely on you for top notch medical care. None of us have your knowledge and background. If you become sick for any length of time it endangers everyone in the Temple. What would Anakin think?”

Padmé smile slightly, managing not to wince as her friend’s barb hit its mark. Because she was right; Padmé knew what Anakin would think. He’d be telling her the same things Cordé was. “Are you calling me selfish?”

“Extremely.”

Padmé pushed off the bench. “How dare you! I give these Jedi my best every day I’m here!”

“How good is your best when you’re fighting dizziness and nausea, Padmé?”

Padmé rounded on Mik at her soft words but the responding anger died in her throat. Mood swings? She felt like her emotions were the center of a grav ball game; not something that normally happened. She took a deep breath and nodded, keeping a tight rein on her temper. If they knew just how fast the comment had set her blood boiling, they'd never leave her alone! "You're right. Both of you. I'm sorry I haven't been thinking about the big picture. I don't have anything scheduled for today; I think I'll go have a meeting with that new diagnostics machine."

"We'll come with you."

Padmé held up her hands, smiling faintly. "I'd rather do this myself."

Cordé and Mik exchanged glances.

Padmé rolled her eyes. "I said I'd run the tests, what more do you want?"

"We'd feel better if you'd let us do the testing, Padmé." Mik allowed reluctantly. "Not that we don't think you're incapable of it, it's just that— well..." She looked to Cordé for support.

"If it's something serious we know you won't tell us."

"I would never do something like that!" Padmé's indignation didn't have to be feigned. "That would be against every oath I ever took for the Syndicate. By not revealing a serious illness or injury to my staff I seriously compromise my ability and ethical responsibility as a Doctor. I would sooner take myself out of practice!"

"Then you'll tell us what the problem is?"

"If it's something that will interfere with my duties; yes. If it's something minor..." Padmé shrugged. "Neither of you are *my* doctor. That's need to know information."

"Padmé, we're worried about you."

"I know Cordé. I promise there's no need to be. Look, I'll go run those scans right now, and when I'm done I'll let you know just how worried you should be, alright?"

"It'll have to be — boss."

"And don't you forget it!" Padmé winked at her friends and patted them on the shoulder. "Now off with you. I know the two of you are attending a seminar today while Lana does the blood work up on Ty."

Cordé and Mik insisted on escorting her back to the Infirmary and left her in the hallway. They left her reluctantly, Padmé having to promise them one last time that she'd run the damn tests just to get them to go. Unfortunately, as loyal as her staff was, they were also a bunch of mother hens. Sometimes she wished they weren't so worried about her life and focused more on their own.

The Infirmary was quiet and she didn't have any excuse to dawdle as her rounds had been completed before she'd gone to see the council. Padmé moved to the diagnostic equipment in one corner, wondering why she hadn't done this the last time when Mace had tried to extract a promise from her to do so. She sighed, shaking her head at her own foolishness; the tests were easily accomplished, she was simply too stubborn when it came to her own health.

She took two blood samples as the machine turned itself on, one for testing and one for control. The blood slides were then inserted into the computer and told to scan for all known foreign agents connected to nausea and dizziness; she expected a long list.

Padmé left the machine on as she went to collect a datapad she'd left in her room with her to-do list for the day. She hadn't yet had the chance to visit the younglings and today, as a "take it easy" day would be the perfect opportunity; she always enjoyed visiting the younglings when Anakin was away. They left her with a peaceful feeling even as it made her long for those children they often talked about. The children they wanted.

Wanted.

She sighed, scooping up the data pad, her gaze falling on the holo she kept by her bedside. Anakin and Obi-Wan, locked in a duel, Anakin's eyes burning with intense fire and passion; almost the same look he had when he made love to her. She sank down on the bed and reached out, pulling her hand back before touching the holo. She missed him dearly. What would he think if he knew she was ill? Her smile was faint, tolerantly loving. She knew what he'd think.

He'd be babying her. She'd be wrapped up in a warm blanket surrounded by his arms while he spoon fed her broth. And she wouldn't have protested the attention one bit. Her throat closed as she regarded the holo, her hand clenching as she fought the urge to touch it, knowing her fingers would pass right through. *Oh, Anakin. I miss you. I hope you're safe, my love.*

She shook off the melancholy and strode from the room, going back to the analysis machine. As expected, it had pulled over four thousand known illnesses with dizziness and nausea as possible or probably symptoms. She refined her search, limiting them to jungle and urban locations and almost cut her list in half. She cut it in half again by eliminating those that had coughs and sinus infections.

Through the next hour she slowly cut the list down by halves until she had twenty possible reasons for her symptoms. She read through each one, slowly crossing them off her list. Halfway through it she stumbled across a non-illness that made her jaw drop in sudden denial.

It's not possible. She stated at it, her mind slow to wrap around the possibility. *Or is it?* She thought back to the mission she and Anakin had finished in bringing Knight Long and the baby boy she'd borne home to the Temple. They'd been on that mission for six weeks, most of which they were alone. Her lips slid into a secretive smile as she remembered his attentions, so gentle and solicitous, determined to put every ounce of time they had to good use.

Her eyes focused on the non-illness and she wiped the screen, turning away. It was possible. It was entirely, completely possible — just unexpected. Slowly she pushed to her feet and took the control sample to another diagnostic machine one desk over. She carefully placed a drop of blood on the scanner and held her breath.

The machine whirled and clicked softly before the display lit up. She gripped the counter, joy swift and sudden, making her dizzy as she sank into the chair in front of the machine. She

was certain if anyone came into the room, or watched the security holos, they'd see her grinning like an idiot, but she wasn't going to let that spoil this moment.

She was finally, after years of trying and hoping, carrying Anakin's child.

Padmé had the presence of mind to wipe the computers clear of all data connected to her newly discovered delicate condition. Her analysis, after the shocking discovery, had further shown that she was seven weeks, almost eight, along. She was still in the early stages and mentally cautioned herself about getting too excited.

Miscarriages, even in their high-tech society, still happened.

The ladies in her small temple practice knew she'd found something, but Padmé, torn between the need to share and the knowledge that doing so would seal Anakin's fate with the Jedi, kept silent. She only informed them that her condition wasn't something transmittable, critical or fatal. She longed to tell them the truth, but didn't dare. The ladies pushed her, but she refused to budge.

She couldn't do that to Anakin.

It didn't help that she suffered in silence, fighting back waves of nausea at inopportune times, fatigue at the strangest moments of the day and dizzy spells that hit whenever they wanted. Mood swings had her on constant alert and her jaw was starting to develop its own spasm from the amount of times she'd had to clench it to prevent sudden tears or anger. All of the factors caused additional stress that led to greater fatigue, eventually becoming noticeable in the dark circles forming under her eyes.

Cordé and Mik, backed by Lana and Anja, finally convinced Padmé to take a couple weeks off.

It took some doing; Padmé hated to be idle when Anakin was away, but eventually she'd been locked in her room with the pass code changed until she'd promised to take it easy. The girls, having seen her exhaustion, had left her locked in her room until the following morning. Padmé wasn't sure if she would laugh or cry for their consideration, so she did neither, firmly holding her emotions in check and taking the time to visit the younglings ward in the Temple as often as she could.

All backgrounds and species stayed in the youngling's barracks until they were taken as Padawans to a single Master at the human age of five. Some were older for those that matured later, but humans, as a rule, were either apprenticed no later than their seventh Birthday, or dismissed. Padmé was glad that the Jedi, as a communal group, cared for the younglings, but it saddened her every time one was sent home, their memory of their time with the Jedi wiped and, sometimes, stripped of their powers.

She hadn't yet figured out how it was possible — she suspected some kind of Force and mental suggestion — especially when the midichlorians were the cause. Maybe the tiny organisms were put to sleep. She wasn't sure. Still, it was sad when one of the children wasn't chosen, and she'd seen Jedi struggle, sometimes for weeks, on the choice of which Padawan to take — it was not an easy decision.

But the children, Jedi-in-training or not, were still children and loved to be held and read to. She told them stories her days as the Monarch back on Naboo, and they regaled her with

their colorful version of Anakin and Obi-Wan's rescue — by her. It was a favorite tale and had become a rite of passage. Every youngling was expected to tell it, each adding their own colorful embellishments. Only, they had to do it in front of her and then Padmé would tell them the truth; toned down so not to scare them, but as much of it as she could.

They never believed her, not on her own at any rate. Each youngling group had needed to be taken aside by “The Negotiator” at some point — when the stories had gotten out of hand — and set straight. Padmé hadn't yet decided if she was amused or resentful of the fact that they believed Obi-Wan's “real” version of events over hers.

Still, they always welcomed her warmly and she looked forward to their every adventure. As she headed for their barracks, a smile spread across her features. Always looked forward to it indeed!

Chapter 3

Author's Note: There's been some speculation about Anakin and Padmé 'trying' to have children; rest assured that's not actually the case. Padmé's musings about *wanting* children are just that; dreams she knew were unattainable... or rather thought they were ;) This pregnancy of hers is totally unexpected and Anakin's reaction is... forthcoming *grin* just not for a bit ;)

Chapter 3

"Padmé!"

"Padmé!"

"Padmé!"

She laughed as Shala, a young green-skinned Twi'lek, bounced at her from the other side of the room. Padmé was caught about the middle and engulfed in a series of warm hugs as the children scrambled to get to her first. It was one of those rare moments that chaos was allowed to reign in the Jedi Temple. "I'm here, I'm here. Gil, you're so big!"

Gil, a boy from Master Windu's home planet, grinned, his white teeth a delightful contrast against his darker skin. "I'll be six next week!"

"And don't you just look it." She ruffled his hair, randomly dispersing hugs and kisses as the swarm of small people each vied for attention. "Oof! Don't push, there's enough of me to go around!"

Joov and Muela, twin Rodians, jostled the other children out of the way, working in tandem together as they pushed through. They arrived in front of her with identical grins on their green faces moments before leaping onto her and gripping tightly with their suction cupped hands.

Padmé laughed, hugging each of them tightly.

"Children."

The children reacted as one to the soft, calm voice of the Jedi in charge of the younglings barracks. The old Jedi Knight, Toulisa, her back still straight despite her advancing years clapped and the children fell in line, reluctantly releasing their hold on Padmé. One by one they turned their gaze to the wizened old woman, respect clear in every line of their posture. Even the little ones, some barely a year old, reacted to her in the same manner.

To Padmé it seemed like Toulisa was the 'Den Mother'. She would fight to the death for a single of her charges. "Toulisa."

"Doctor." The Jedi cracked a smile. "You've not visited us this much for a long time. I think you're starting to spoil the children."

“Do you think I should stop?”

“Did I say that?” Toulisa winked at her and then clapped her hands twice, her face becoming severe. “How do we properly greet the Doctor?”

“Good morning Doctor Naberrie.”

Padmé’s smile was unhindered, completely charmed by the chorus of musical voices despite herself. It never ceased to amaze her how innocently delighted their voices sounded. “Good morning children. Did we have an eventful night?”

They nodded, some glancing at Toulisa as if looking for permission to speak.

Toulisa ignored the looks. “Did you have an eventful night, Doctor? I hear you’re on holidays — which is why you’re visiting us so much.”

Some of the children giggled.

Padmé shrugged, caught. “It’s true. It would seem I’m my own worst patient.”

“Doc sick?”

Padmé shook her head at the concern in the high-pitched voice. “No, children. I’m not ill. Nothing serious or contagious or I’d be tied to my bed drinking one of Mik’s horrible concoctions!”

“Yuck!”

Toulisa pinned the group with a look, searching for the outspoken imp. Her gaze stopped and she pointed to a spot in front of her. “Mia. Here; now.”

The small human two year old toddled out. She was steadier than any other children Padmé had seen at that age. She supposed with the children growing up learning to be self-sufficient, it had to start at an early age. Padmé still didn’t feel right about such young children in training, but it wasn’t her place to criticize. Besides, while Mia might be a little slow on the speaking side, she certainly had better reactions than some adults Padmé had met.

“Y’sm?”

Toulisa waited until the youngling stopped in front of her, an innocent expression on her face. “Was that you?”

The impish child nodded. “Bad tastes f’om Mik.” Her face scrunched up in a priceless expression of distaste. “Yuck.”

“Is it polite to say that about something that has made you well?”

Mia shrugged. “Icky stuff.”

“But is it nice?”

Mia’s pony tail bobbed and swung as she shook her head. “Not nice.”

“What do you say to Doctor Naberrie?”

Mia made a face, heaving a suffering sigh before turning to look at Padmé. “Me S’r’y Doc Nabe’ie”

“Apology accepted Mia. I promise I won’t tell Mik what you think of her potions.”

Mia’s face lit up and she glanced at Toulisa for permission before darting back into the lines of younglings. “T’an’k you”

Toulisa waved at the younglings to disperse. “You’ve all chores to do; off with you.”

The younglings were slow to depart, most dragging their heels, some darting in to snatch a hug or a kiss as they bounced from the room. Padmé and Toulisa shared a tolerant smile as the last of the stragglers departed from the common room. The children were in charge of keeping the barracks clean and tidy and were allowed no play time until it was finished. Toulisa had shared with Padmé it was one of the secrets of teaching the children responsibility and control.

As Toulisa settled into one of the chairs flanking the caf table in the center of the room, Padmé came to sit nearby, visually checking the older Jedi for signs of weakness and age. Toulisa wasn’t a young woman, nearly three times Padmé’s age, and Padmé could only hope that she would age as gracefully. “What brings you to my doorstep this morning, Doctor? Surely not my belligerent company.”

“I came looking for advice, actually.” Padmé’s smile was faint. “It’s about Knight Long’s child.”

“Ah yes, what did Lana call him? Ty?” Toulisa seemed to debate the name in silence for a moment. “A good strong name for Cyan’s child, I think. What’s the problem?”

Padmé grimaced. “He’s almost ready to come here to the nursery but Lana thinks keeping him away from his mother is doing more harm than good.”

Toulisa waved away the comment as if it meant nothing. For, in fact, to Jedi it was nothing. The sooner a child was taken away from the parents, the less likely it would be either side would form a long lasting commitment. On the mother’s side it was almost impossible to avoid; carrying a child to term meant some kind of connection. On the child’s side, the sooner they were taken away after birth the better.

Lana had argued that the children weren’t getting the nutrients and antibodies they needed from their mothers, only to be brought up short by the Jedi nursery. Several women, all young and with children of their own, were brought in to manage the nursery and feeding time of the infants. They were rotated out every few weeks to avoid either side forming an attachment.

Which mean the younglings grew to depend on themselves and the other younglings.

“Lana’s intentions are good, Doctor — and I know you don’t agree with our system — but the methods have been developed over a thousand years. I assure you it works and Ty will be in the best of hands.”

“I never doubted that, Toulisa. I’m concerned about what happens if the boy doesn’t get chosen as a Padawan.”

Toulisa waved it away. “Not your place to worry m’dear. If the boy’s parentage is what I think it is, you’ve nothing to worry about in that department anyway.”

“Meaning?”

Toulsa chuckled, the sound almost a cackle. “The boy will be strong in the Force, mark my words. The strong ones never have to worry about *not* getting chosen. It’s too much trouble and effort to send them away.”

“Lana will be pleased. Is there a better time of day for me to send her down with him?”

“Pick a time, Padmé; someone is always here.”

Padmé rose to her feet, knowing the sound of a dismissal when she heard one. She’d been hoping to spend more time with the younglings, but she didn’t want to overstay her welcome. “I’ll be sure to have him sent over this afternoon. May the Force be with you, Toulsa.”

“And you Doctor. Take care of that cold, understand me?”

Padmé mock-bowed. “I’m barely evening feeling it. My regards to your charges.” She departed with a minimal fuss, absently noting it was much easier to leave when the younglings were occupied with their chores. But it left her at a loss for what to do with the rest of her day. She sighed as she walked; wondering if she’d ever get over the euphoric knowledge that she was carrying Anakin’s child.

And if she’d ever be able to share it.

She stopped in the corridor outside the younglings barracks, slipping into one of the abundant meditation nooks and sinking down on the round stool. She gripped the fabric tightly, the wave of desolation that had hit had been so sudden, so unexpected, she’d almost tripped on nothing. Padmé took a deep breath, closing her eyes and mentally telling herself to stop it. “It’s not that bad,” she whispered to herself, her fingers digging deeply into the cushion as she fought against irrational tears. She took another deep breath, trying to find emotional balance..

“Are you alright, Doctor Naberrie?”

Her eyes popped open at the calm, concerned question.

“Master Shaak Ti!”

The Master inclined her head. “Are you well?”

Padmé blinked back the tears on the edge of her lashes and managed to smile. “Fine, actually. I just suddenly felt like I was the only non-Force sensitive person allowed to live in the temple.”

The Mater’s serene expression changed fractionally, a crinkle about her eyes. “You know this is not the case.”

“I know it, but that doesn’t stop me from feeling otherwise sometimes, Master.”

“Things are not always what they seem, Doctor. It must be difficult being in the Temple without your closest Jedi friends.”

Padmé nodded. “Very. Master Windu is here, but Jedi Skywalker is not. With Master Windu as busy as he is, he has little time for discussion not central to Jedi life. Jedi Skywalker...” she paused and then shrugged. “He doesn’t have the responsibilities of the Masters. I’m grateful for his friendship.”

Shaak Ti smiled faintly, a twitch of her lips. "Friendship. Yes. You have other friends, do you not?"

"None as close as he. I find that being the person in charge of someone's long recovery allows a friendship to form and endure beyond acquaintance."

"And it does you credit. If you will excuse me Doctor."

Padmé nodded and the stately Jedi Master moved off. She closed her eyes, leaning her head against the padded wall. Did she suspect? Padmé, for all her years in the Temple, still had problems reading Jedi, but Shaak Ti's words had sent a sliver of fear skirting down her spine. The Master had implied more than friendship in a simple, masterful stroke.

Padmé reached up to slide her hand around the Japor snippet she'd taken to wearing under the neckline of her shirt. She squeezed it tightly before letting go and opening her eyes resolutely. If the Master suspected, there was no helping it. Suspicions were one thing, proof was another. And if Padmé had any say, they weren't going to get what they needed to cast Anakin out of the order.

She'd find some way to hide her pregnancy; it just wasn't certain yet what that would be.

"Ah, Doctor Nabberrie." Palpatine's smile was welcoming as he rose to his feet, beckoning her forward. "It is always my pleasure to have you for dinner my dear."

"The pleasure is mine, Chancellor." Padmé returned with a smile, taking the hand he extended and squeezing his fingers. "These dinners are often the highlight of my week."

"Is your life that dull, my dear?" Palpatine's smile was almost teasing. "Come, come, before our meal cools."

One of his aids held a chair for her which she graciously took, sitting just to the Chancellor's right. "I've been placed on temporary leave, Chancellor."

"Call me Palpatine, my dear; Chancellor seems so formal for such friends as we."

"I could never do that, Excellency." She smiled at the oft heard request, her answer the same as always. "But thank you for the honor."

"Always a pleasure. Where is young Skywalker this evening?"

Padmé managed to somehow keep the sudden surge of desolation from her face. Her hormones were running, her emotions swinging like a pendulum. She'd found that any mention of Anakin was enough to drive her to the brink of tears. Somehow, she managed to keep her voice steady. "Jedi Skywalker and Master Kenobi are currently searching for the General, Excellency. If they can stop him, they might be able to put an end to this war."

"The sooner the better," Palpatine agreed, leaning slightly away from the table as the serving droids brought out the first course. "Anakin tells me — why, my dear, whatever is the matter?"

Padmé turned her face away, her eyes having flooded with tears at the sound of his name. She blindly grasped the napkin by her plate and pressed it over her face. Mortified by her

reaction, unable to control the sudden tears, she bit her lip to keep the sobs in her throat.

“Doctor Naberrie?”

She couldn’t answer as she fought for control. Taking a deep breath, she felt her whole body shake as she fought against the overwhelming feeling of loneliness.

A gentle hand touched her shoulder. “My dear, I’m terribly sorry, I did not mean to cause you distress.”

“I’m fine.” She choked out the words, rubbing her face in the napkin, feeling her wayward emotions slowly returning to normal. But the empty feeling in the pit of her stomach, the weight that had settled somewhere in the vicinity of her heart, made control difficult. “I’m fine, I’m sorry.”

The Chancellor’s hand awkwardly patted her shoulder. “Nothing to be ashamed about my dear, the stress you’re under at the temple is considerable. We’re all human you know.”

Padmé wiped her face, taking a deep breath before lifting her head and managing a slightly shaky smile for him. “I’m so sorry, Chancellor, I didn’t mean for... I mean, I never meant to —”

He patted her shoulder again. “I understand. It can’t be easy being surrounded by Jedi day after day with your only Jedi friend constantly being sent on missions.”

“It’s not.” She agreed. “But Cordé, Mik and Lana are wonderful.”

The Chancellor retook his seat. “I understand the Jedi healer assigned to work with you will be taking both her trials and her final exams for the medical field.”

“That’s right.” Padmé took a sip of her water, letting the cool liquid sooth the burning muscles of her tight throat. “Anja has shown quite an adept feel for the profession. If she weren’t a Jedi, I’d have recommended a more vigorous training program.”

“A Jedi first before all else.”

“They all are.” Padmé sighed. “Chancellor, may I ask a somewhat personal question?”

He nodded for her to proceed, beginning to eat the soup that was their first course.

Padmé dipped her spoon into the shallow bowl, carefully phrasing the question in her mind. She met his gaze. “Do you think what the Jedi do to raise their children is proper?”

Palpatine regarded her thoughtfully, taking another sip of his soup before patting his lips with his napkin. “I believe they think that they do is proper. The Jedi ways are not common knowledge, my dear. Was there something that you’ve seen that you find needs to be addressed?”

“No, of course not.” Padmé dropped her gaze to her soup plate. “I simply don’t agree with taking a child from their mother before a bond can be formed.”

“Ah, but Jedi are not allowed to form attachments, Doctor Naberrie. Surely you have heard of that.”

“Daily.”

Palpatine chuckled. “You sound so bitter, my dear. They must have explained that to you when you agreed to take the position.”

“No attachments means these children are allowed to form superficial friendships, Chancellor. They’re not allowed to form the bonds necessary to healthy development.”

“Are you studying child psychology, Doctor?”

Padmé chuckle, shaking her head. “Nothing so drastic. I have a child specialist — Lana — on my team. She’s asked me to broach the subject with the Council. I fear, if I do, they may see it as criticism of methods used to raise Jedi for the last thousand years.”

“The Jedi are an enlightened group — it cannot hurt to ask.”

Padmé finished her soup, leaning forward slightly on the table as the droid removed her bowl. “That’s just it; it *can* hurt to ask. The Jedi trust me to mind my own business. Unless it’s phrased diplomatically, and not as a challenge, things could go badly.”

“Would speaking with a single member of the council possibly be a better option? Master Windu, perhaps? I understand you and he are quite close.”

“As close as he’s allowed.” Padmé’s smile was wry. “Master Windu believes my personal welfare and happiness are partially his responsibility.”

“A just payment for the cost of his life.” Palpatine’s smile was easy. “He would be concerned if you are troubled, my dear, perhaps you should speak with him.”

She sighed. “He’d want to know my reasons.”

“What *are* your reasons, Doctor?”

Padmé’s eyes narrowed at the soft, almost subtle hiss in Palpatine’s words. Had she imagined the tone, the slight pressure she thought she felt from that question? She examined his face carefully. It was open, concerned, and the mask of the perfect host. Her shoulders relaxed. “Personal and Professional. I have become quite attached to the younglings’ barracks.”

“You’re not getting any younger my dear, perhaps it’s time you started a family of your own.”

“Is that a proposition, sir?”

“I’m old enough to be your father; most certainly not. Young Skywalker, perhaps?”

The laugh she wanted to voice stuck in her throat for fear of being hysterical. “Ana—” she cleared her throat. “He’s a Jedi, Chancellor. Hardly allowed to have a wife and family.”

“Ah, but there are several with secrets even the council is unaware of. Skywalker’s children would be powerful indeed.”

Padmé’s gaze dropped to the welcome distraction of the main course being served, confusion and worry whirling through her mind. Powerful? Could he be right? One hand dropped unconsciously to her lower abdomen where the precious new life lay, unaware of its potential, unaware of the dangers surrounding its conception. She swallowed a lump in her throat. “I’m afraid a husband and family are not in my future, Chancellor.”

“Alas. You’d make a wonderful mother, Doctor.”

“Skywalker’s children would likely be taken by the temple, Excellency. Even if I had the notion to carry... to bear... his chil... childr—” She stopped, aware she was stuttering and firmly regained control of herself. “Even if I had the notion to bear his children, they would be taken from me. I work in the temple; I can afford no distractions in my duties just as the Jedi cannot afford distractions in theirs. If I were to bear Force sensitive children...” She stopped. “It’s preposterous to consider, Excellency, for it will never happen.”

“It may, my dear.” He regarded her shrewdly and she had the sinking feeling he knew. He not only knew she was lying but that she was in fact pregnant at that very moment. But he couldn’t know. There was no possible way he could know. Her own people didn’t know, *Anakin* didn’t yet know; no one knew except her.

She managed a weak smile, folding her napkin. “I apologize, Chancellor, but I’m not feeling well. If you’ll excuse me, I think I’d like to return to the Temple and lie down.”

“You’re not unwell?”

“I’ve been fighting a virus for some time. I tire easily.”

Palpatine made a motion and one of his aids, Sly Moore, arrived at their table. “The Doctor is feeling unwell. See that she makes it home safely.”

Sly Moore bowed and turned silently to Padmé.

“That’s really unnecessary—”

“I insist, Milady, it is the least I can do. I apologize for taxing your strength this evening, I did not intend to.”

She managed a weak smile. “The apologies are mine, Chancellor. I will contact you tomorrow about next week.”

“Rest well, Doctor. I look forward to your call.”

Padmé stepped out of the speeder, thanking Sly Moore with a nod before turning to the Temple steps. She barely heard the speeder drive off as she stared at the unique structure, unable to climb the walkway. It rose majestically out of the ground, the pinnacle of openness, free for all who seek knowledge and wisdom to enter. The building was airy, open and welcoming. But to Padmé, as she stared at it, she wondered if it wasn’t a gilded cage of clever design.

For, at that moment, she felt trapped, isolated, as surely as an inmate is placed in isolation for bad behavior. *Is that what this is?* she wondered silently, staring at the Jedi Temple. *A cage where my opinions and expressions have to be monitored and controlled? A cage where freedom of thought is suppressed in favor of the ‘greater good’? Am I not condoning, even assisting it by staying?*

The dark thoughts held her in check, forcing her to consider more than she wanted, more than she knew she could handle with the knowledge of her secrets and Anakin’s future

hanging in the balance. She couldn't leave without telling him why; couldn't betray him like that.

Padmé felt tears sting the back of her eyes and bowed her head. *How can I leave? My life, my job and my future are here? For right or wrong, it is not my place to judge.*

She shivered, pulling her coat closer about herself and forcing her feet to move. Slowly, one step at a time, she began the long climb towards the main entrance.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4

Padmé's dark thoughts followed her through the next few days as she struggled with sickness, dizziness and depression. The Chancellor's words, his allusions to her current state, even though phrased as innocent questions, haunted her. She wracked her brain, trying to find out what could have possibly been said, or what she'd let slip, to give him the hints as to her condition. She hadn't even known about it during their last meal together.

Her sleep patterns became erratic, leading to odd hours, as she was plagued by nightmares. Nightmares about losing the child Anakin knew nothing about, about his expulsion in absentee, about his death. She tossed and turned, haunted by images of bearing a still-born child, of the joy and then disappointment on Anakin's face. She dreamed of having to give up her baby to the Temple.

The dreams progressively became worse, causing her to lose her train of thought mid-sentence when speaking with the council, and eventually shortening her temper dramatically.

Cordé was attempting to assist her with midichlorian counts for the newest round of babies brought in for the nursery, a round of new apprentices having been chosen the day before. Padmé pushed away from the genetic sequencer with a frustrated motion. "This is pointless. Midichlorian counts play no part in the selection of a child as an apprentice!"

"Padmé!" Cordé looked at her friend shocked.

"Well, they don't." Padmé rubbed her forehead, feeling the sleepless nights catching up with her. "I know we've got to identify the children's genetic codes and their weaknesses but midichlorians compensate for those. They have us doing make work!"

Cordé began to reply as Padmé made to get to her feet. The world suddenly tilted, a rush of heat spreading through her system as she was suddenly, and acutely aware of the fact she was about to faint in front of her closest friend.

Padmé came to and found herself stretched out on the floor, a worried looking Cordé holding her hand, something soft balled up under her head.

"Padmé? Are you alright?"

"Fine."

A stern hand was placed on her shoulder as Padmé made to push herself up. "She been moody, argumentative all morning and faints in the middle of a conversation and she calls herself fine." Cordé's eyes narrowed with her dark humor. "I don't believe you."

"I gathered that." Padmé's weak attempt at humor fell flat, her head beginning to pound. *When was the last time I ate?* She couldn't remember. "I really am quite healthy."

“And pregnant.”

“Right, and — what?” Padmé paused in the motion to trying to right herself without making her head spin, her gaze snapping to Cordé’s. Cordé had settled back on her heels to watch her friend with narrowed eyes, and Padmé’s heart sank and her voice practically failed her, dropping to a horrified whisper she couldn’t help. “Don’t be ridiculous.”

“I’m not.”

“Why do you think that?”

Cordé remained silent for a long minute before her face finally softened and Padmé could read the hurt she was feeling. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

Padmé turned her face away, gripping the edge of the nearby desk to assist her in regaining her feet. Her mind was racing. Cordé was right, and obviously wouldn’t believe otherwise, but she couldn’t speak in the main area of the Temple Infirmary. “Cordé?” Her voice held a tremor she couldn’t fight.

Cordé straightened, sliding under Padmé’s outstretched arm. “Stubborn Doctor.”

Padmé managed a weak smile, leaning on her friend as she was steered out of the lab and back towards her room. They didn’t speak until they were inside her quarters, the door firmly shut behind them. Cordé helped Padmé to her bed, where she sank down gratefully, feeling the world beginning to spin again.

Cordé settled beside her friend, reaching up to loosen the fastening on Padmé’s clothing to help her cool down. “Were you going to tell me?”

Padmé sighed, looking at her friend. “How did you find out?”

Cordé laughed softly. “You forgot to get rid of your control sample. I was going to destroy it, but Mik and Lana and I were all so worried about you even after you insisted you were fine I had to test it. I’m sorry, Padmé, I know I shouldn’t have, but...” she shrugged and shook her head sadly. “We were worried; we wanted to help.”

“Do the others know?”

“No, I only did the test yesterday morning when you didn’t seem to be losing your symptoms.”

Padmé breathed a silent sigh of relief. “They can’t know, Cordé.”

“Why not? Lana would be—”

“I said no.” Padmé pushed herself off the mattress and clasped Cordé’s hand urgently. “Think for a minute, if they find out, who are they going to tell?”

“The syndicate, but that shouldn’t—” Cordé’s eyes widened. “They don’t know either?”

“I can’t tell them.”

“Padmé!” Cordé’s shocked expression said it all. “Not tell the syndicate? You’ll never be put on maternity leave!”

"I won't be taking leave." Padmé's had to force the words through her lips. It had taken a long week of self-exploration to come to that decision. She couldn't afford to take the leave and have the Syndicate discover her unofficial unmarried status — or her married status to a former patient. The scandal, and subsequent trial, would be more than she could bear.

"Not take... You can't be serious."

"Deadly, Cordé. There are circumstances..." she faltered. She couldn't even tell Cordé, not the whole story.

"Anakin's the father, isn't he?"

Padmé felt the blood leave her face, knew she was the same color as her sheets. She couldn't answer.

Cordé gripped Padmé's hand. "Is that why you don't want to tell the Syndicate? Because of the ethical question of having relations with a former patient? That was years ago, Padmé, years. They can't hold you accountable for an intimate encounter five years later. I never pegged you to have a fling, or to be this reckless, but I know you have feelings for Anakin, so I—"

"We're married."

Cordé stopped at Padmé's soft interjection. "You what?"

Padmé licked her lips, plucking at the blanket on her bed, having made her decision. She needed to talk to someone and Cordé already knew most of it. It would be a relief to get it off her chest, to share the secret with a trusted friend, one who had proven to be trustworthy. For no one else knew the true extent of her feelings for the young Jedi. "Anakin and I were married shortly after the end of my trial against Helkor."

"And you didn't tell me that either?"

Padmé reached out to grip Cordé's hand again, needing the human contact as much as to try and get her to understand. "I couldn't Cordé. I wanted to, oh how I wanted to, but if anyone found out... if the Council finds out..." she stopped, the knowledge of what could happen blocking her throat. "Anakin could be expelled."

"And you could lose your right to practice."

"I don't care what happens to me, Cordé, I made my decision when I said yes. I knew the risks; I knew what I was doing. But I couldn't help it. I love him so much." She bowed her head, blinking back the tears that followed thoughts of Anakin. "He doesn't even know he's going to be a father yet."

"And you can't reach him." Cordé pulled her friend into a sympathetic hug. "I understand, Padmé. I can't believe you've been living with such a secret, with such a burden for over five years and I didn't even have a clue!" She paused, her eyes sparkling. "Well, maybe one or two. There was that time I walked in to find Anakin with his lips on your neck."

"And the time you caught us kissing in the turbolift."

"That one too." Cordé smiled, gently rubbing Padmé's back. "I never thought — just where did you get married anyway?"

“In my suites. We had another of my older patients perform the ceremony.”

“No witnesses?”

Padmé shook her head, pulling back to brush her hand across her eyes. “No witnesses. We didn’t dare, but I really wanted you to be there.”

“I’d have loved to come. But that is neither here nor there. What are we going to do about and your pregnancy?”

“In what way?”

“We’re in a temple full of Jedi. Eventually they’re going to notice that you’ve got more than one life force around you.”

“Only if they focus on me.”

“Do you know if it’s a boy or a girl yet?”

Padmé laughed softly, feeling her spirits improve immeasurably. “Not yet. I’m not in my second trimester yet.”

“We could still get a tentative reading. Don’t tell me you’re not the least bit curious.”

“Oh, I am.” Padmé assured her smiling. “I’m also terrified.”

“Then we can be terrified together. From now on I’m going to be your shadow. That way if the Jedi sense anything funny you can say it’s just the two of us.”

“I can’t impose—”

“No imposition.” Cordé broke into her objection with a grin, wagging her finger in Padmé’s face. “And until you learn Jedi tricks to shield yourself — which you can never learn my friend — this will be safer. I’ll also take over delivering the morning reports to the council to minimize your contact with them.”

“I couldn’t—”

“You will.” Cordé corrected firmly. “The council knows we’ve placed you on restricted duties. There’s no reason, for medical safety, we can’t keep it as such indefinitely.”

“They’ll beginning to suspect something is wrong.”

“Not if we give them a plausible reason. You’ve been back from your last mission, a very stressful mission I might add.” She pinned Padmé with a look. “Which is why we placed you on leave. In addition you’re fighting some kind of invasive organism that we’re treating but it’s a delicate treatment. Until we’re able to cure you and remove it from your system, you’re not to be over stressed.”

“You’re lying but you’re not.” Padmé laughed. “So that’s how you fool a Jedi.”

“A little truth thrown in adds spice and makes it easier to remember. What do you say, boss? Restricted duties for the next few months until the baby’s born?”

“If I must. But you can’t tell Mik, Lana or Anja the truth. If this gets out...”

Cordé sighed. “Your condition will make itself known eventually, Padmé. By then I hope we’ll have a descent cover story for you.” She stood, smoothing down her smock with steady hands. “But for now you need your rest. When was the last time you ate?”

Padmé couldn’t remember with certainty and shrugged with a blush. “I don’t remember.”

“Food first then. Relax; I’ll bring it to you, then you get to rest, nurse Cordé’s orders. Once you’re rested and back on your feet we’ll talk more.”

Padmé made to object but the stern look Cordé shot her was so fierce she meekly sank back into the covers. Glad for the respite, despite the protest she’d been about to voice, she settled under the cover with a sigh. Her heart felt lighter after the brief talk with her friend. She was looking forward to whatever Cordé would bring her and their discussions. Telling someone everything would give her a chance to find her balance again.

Now, if only Anakin would come home, everything would be perfect.

Chapter 5

Author's Note: I'm going to -try— and get an update done on this story daily until posted, but no guarantee; I will do my best though :)

Chapter 5

"You've a message coming through Doctor." Anja stuck her head into Padmé's room. "Channel four alpha zeta. It's Jedi Kenobi."

Padmé's heart skipped a beat; had something happened to Anakin? Obi-Wan didn't contact her unless he absolutely had to as he'd made it very plain he didn't appreciate the connection he saw between herself and Anakin. She turned away to the terminal, itching to answer it. "Thank you Anja."

"You're welcome."

Padmé waited for the sound of the Jedi's steps to disappear and then took a deep breath. *It's just Obi-Wan. I'm sure he's not calling to tell you your husband — whom he doesn't know about — has been killed in action.* She closed her eyes for a moment, searching for that core of strength inside her, before turning on the comm. display.

Obi-Wan Kenobi's small image was relaxed and smiling. "Doctor Naberrie, thank you for taking my call."

"It's my pleasure Master Kenobi, what can I do for you?"

"Anakin and I have run into a bit of mishap we were hoping you could help us with."

Padmé blinked. Mishap? A mishap that had Obi-Wan smiling? "I'll do what I can, but my knowledge is mostly limited to the medical field."

"Oh, I trust you'll find this is your field of expertise. Anakin and I have ingested a kind of plant that makes it impossible to stop smiling."

Padmé blinked and began to laugh. "You can't be serious."

"Oh, deadly."

Padmé looked at Obi-Wan's image more closely, and found there were strain lines about his eyes and lips that he hadn't had before. "You look a little worn about the edges, Master Kenobi."

His eyes flashed, but his posture and pleasant expression never changed. "I'm glad you're enjoying this, Doctor. Can you accept my analysis of this insidious root?"

"Certainly, give me a moment." Padmé turned on the appropriate analyze codes. "When you're ready,"

"If you could just tell me what it is."

"And how to cure it?"

He nodded. "It's not in our field guide."

"What planet are you on, Master Kenobi?" She asked as the details of the plan were running through the machine. "Or am I not allowed to know?"

"On an open frequency, Doctor?" Obi-Wan's tone almost sounded offended. "I'm afraid I can't tell you."

"Withyroot." Padmé looked up with a grin. "You've ingested withyroot. It's a plant native to several star systems and is used rather widely in medicine for patients who can't use bacta. It dulls the pain and gives a sense of euphoria. It also has a side effect that you've been experiencing."

"Blast!" Obi-Wan's smile was strained. "How do we stop the effects?"

"How long have you had symptoms?"

"A little over a day."

Padmé blinked, giving a grin of her own. "You boiled it."

"Anakin said it would make a good soup!"

"I'm sure it does." She laughed. "The good news is that the effects should wear off sometime today. Even boiled they last for no more than forty hours. It's a very potent brew, sadly with no cure, per-say. The beneficial effects have never needed to be undone and the side effects are generally mild — unless boiled."

"Blast!" Obi-Wan sighed. "Thank you for your help, Doctor."

"My pleasure. Was there anything else?"

"Anakin wishes to say a few words, if you're not too busy."

"I've a few minutes to spare." She hoped she didn't sound as desperate as she felt for the sound of Anakin's voice. "I'm currently on my break."

"You take breaks?" Anakin's image appeared, quickly replacing Obi-Wan's, his smile teasing and looking far more natural than Kenobi's. "I thought all they did was work you to the bone."

She chuckled, barely managing to keep the tears welling in her eyes from running down her face. "More or less. Cordé's making me take my breaks now."

"Good for her. I owe her dinner when we get back."

"Anakin."

His grin turned impish. "It's the least I can do, without me around, they take advantage of you."

"I let them; I need something to occupy my time."

He chuckled softly and winked at her. "I'm glad I can be a distraction."

"One I could use right now. Any idea when you'll be ho—" she stopped, conscious of the possibility that Obi-Wan was hanging on every word.

"Not yet. We're still tracing these Force awful rumors. We've been to ten different planets and found nothing. No Grievous, no outposts, no Trade Federation; nothing. I feel like we're on some wild mynock chase."

Padmé didn't dare voice the possibility that their trip away was deliberate. The line was an open comm. as anyone could have been listening. She also didn't dare risk the tumultuous hold she had on her emotions. Seeing him; talking to him, and not being able to say anything, to tell him the good news was agonizing. "I'm sure you'll find him eventually."

Anakin's expression turned solemn, though the smile on his face didn't change. "Eventually. I hope sooner rather than later; I've been gone too long. I find myself longing for the clean sheets and good company of the Jedi Temple."

Her throat ached. She clenched her hands into fists as she fought to keep the tears from her face, knowing even as she did it was futile. "I look forward to hearing you've accomplished your mission, Anakin. Good luck."

Padmé switched off the comm. line before Anakin could ask; for she knew he'd seen her tears and hadn't understood them. She buried her face in her arms, collapsing on the desk in front of her, and let the sobs come freely, needing the tension release. She cried, forcing herself to cry longer and harder than she had since she'd found out she was pregnant. Hearing his voice, seeing his face was torture without being able to tell him.

It took several long minutes before she sniffled and blew her nose, brushing the remnants of her tears from her cheeks. Her gaze went back to the comm. and the last image she'd seen of Anakin. His smiling face, his worried gaze as he'd taken in the tear rolling silently down her cheek.

She only hoped he'd been the only one.

Padmé took the next day off on bed rest, letting Cordé speak for her, and allowing her staff to believe she'd finally succumbed to exhaustion. It was easier and neater than telling them the truth. Cordé had found her after the discussion with Anakin, and they'd talked for several hours. Padmé had poured out her fears and her grief at being unable to tell Anakin the news at her first opportunity.

It was a much needed discussion and helped bolster her flagging spirits. Cordé had insisted she rest and Padmé had acquiesced — with the condition she be allowed to catch up on all of the research reports she'd not yet caught up on. Cordé had agreed; she wasn't likely to overstress herself reading about midicholrians.

And so, a datapad, a pitcher of warm cocoa — no caf now that she was pregnant — and a warm blanket kept her company as she lay curled in bed catching up on the fascinating world of the microbes which gave Jedi their unique powers.

"Doctor Padmé?"

She looked up at the sound of the young voice in her doorway; she hadn't heard the door open. "Shala," she smiled, beckoning the child in. "Come in, sweetie; what can I do for you?"

The young Twi'lek smiled shyly, hesitating in the doorway. "Are you busy?"

Padmé placed the datapad on her nightstand and motioned for her to come in once more. "No, Shala. I'm resting; I wasn't feeling well today."

The little girl's face turned worried. "Are you sick?"

"Just feeling down. Have you come to brighten my day?"

She nodded, her head tails bouncing. "I hope so! It's my turn to tell *the story*!"

Padmé chuckled. "Well, don't stand in the doorway, come here and have a seat."

"But..." she frowned. "But you have to come to the barracks; I gotta say it in front of everyone!"

"Do you now?" Padmé's eyes sparkled as she watched the enchanting child. The young Twi'lek was one of her favorite younglings. "Who said so?"

Her luminescent eyes blinked, confusion clear on her face. "Everyone else did."

"Ah, but I'm the keeper of the true tale; and everyone has had to say it in my presence. Does it matter if we have an audience?"

"But—"

"Shala."

The girl flushed.

"Does it really matter that much if everyone else hears your story?"

"Well, no." She scuffed her foot on the floor. "I guess not."

"Then come here and tell me your story, young lady."

Shala giggled. "I'm a Twi'lek!"

"But a young lady, none-the-less. Now, do you need to be standing or sitting?"

"I'm going to act it out." The girl proudly puffed out her chest. "But I don't have people to play The Negotiator and the Hero with No Fear."

Padmé grinned. "How about we wait then? I'm sure everyone will want to see you acting out the story; I haven't seen it done that way yet."

Shala heaved a big sigh. "Oh, alright. Only 'cause you're not feeling well though. I really do know the story."

"I know you do, sweetie." Padmé did her best to look serious but the child looked so forlorn she wanted to smile. "I'll come by as soon as I'm feeling better, ok?"

"Ok." Shala darted into the room and paused by the bed, suddenly uncertain of herself. "Padmé?"

“What is it?”

“If I give you a hug, will I make you better?”

She chuckled softly. “You won’t make me worse. Come here.”

Shala threw her arms around Padmé’s neck and hugged her tightly. “I hope you feel better soon. I’ll tell all the younglings so we don’t make you sick again when you come visit. I promise we’ll be good too — you won’t have to get caf or a snack or anything!”

Padmé gently squeezed the girl in a tight hug before letting her go. “My visits to you never tax me, Shala. I’ll miss you once you’re apprenticed.”

“I’ll still be here,” she promised with an impish grin. “But I’ll have to come visit you more often since I’ll have a Master of my own!”

“Call it a deal. Off with you now.”

Shala beamed and darted away, pausing to smile once more on the threshold before the door closed behind her. Padmé laughed softly, shaking her head as she retrieved her datapad and settled once more into the cozy cocoon on her bed. But Shala’s presence stayed with her, the image of her smile lifting her spirits the way nothing else in the last two days had.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6

“Pinchers.”

Cordé slid the instrument requested into Padmé’s hand.

“Clamps.”

A second instrument followed the first.

Padmé bent over the wound, applying the surgical tools to stem the flow of blood. The young Jedi on her operating table moaned, shivering. Padmé glanced up at Anja. “Hold her! If I connect the wrong vessels her lekku will never work the same again!”

Anja’s concentration obviously deepened as she fought to keep the Jedi in place, sweat popping out on her brow.

Padmé examined the severed end with a frown, feeling her stomach churn. She locked her jaw; she was *not* going to get queasy with someone depending on her. Checking the vessels, she then began the slow process of reconnecting them, making the first of a hundred she would need to bring them together.

The process was slow, forcing her to stand at an angle, her eyes glued to the veins of the Twi’lek’s lekku. She had the vague feeling of everything disappearing, everything becoming insignificant as she worked. The room vanished, the slightly queasy rotation vanishing with it, as the surgery became her only concern. Her stomach settled and her hands increased their pace as she felt more in control of herself than before.

Slowly, agonizingly slowly, the severed portions of the lekku were brought back together, the vessels reconnected and the veins reattached. Padmé paused only to change the needle for one with more synth-thread before sealing the wound shut from the outside. She ached abominably as she straightened, completely unaware that several hours had passed since she’d begun her work, and nodded to Cordé, placing both hands in the center of her lower back and massaging through her scrubs. “I want her in bacta until tomorrow. Lekku are tricky so she’s to be watched constantly.”

Cordé nodded. “I’ll set Mik up on the first watch.”

“Good thinking.” Padmé shifted her stance, thrusting her hips forward and arching her back to relieve the pain. Her back cracked in several places, followed by a sigh as the young Twi’lek was wheeled away. Without thinking she rubbed her stomach as it fluttered. Shaking her head — the training accidents with the young Jedi were the most common and the hardest — she headed to her sanitization room. Padmé did her best not to think about Shala coming into her infirmary with such an injury.

Cordé joined her, taking the opportunity to scrub down as Anja settled their patient into the bacta tank. “Nice work, Doc.”

Padmé smiled faintly. “I’d be happier if accidents like these didn’t happen. Pitting two barely trained younglings against each other with lightsabers is ludicrous!”

Cordé sighed. “That’s a fifth year apprentice out there, Padmé and she was well trained by her Master. Accidents *do* happen, you know.”

Padmé blushed at Cordé pointed look, rubbing her hands harder as she resisted the urge to cover her lower abdomen. “I am well aware that *accidents* happen. I’m simply saying that children shouldn’t be permitted such a potentially lethal weapon.”

“Criticizing again, Padmé?” Cordé pulled off her body scrubs before yanking off her hair cover and tossing them in the disposal unit. Her tone changed and she glanced meaningfully at Padmé stomach. “How long?”

Padmé cast a sidelong look at her friend before reaching for a towel. “I can’t help but criticize. I can’t abide children being hurt.” Her tone dropped. “This morning.”

Cordé’s eyes shone with excitement. “Can we check?”

Padmé began stripping off the rest of her scrubs. “I doubt we’ll be able to tell.”

“So? You can’t tell me you’re not the least bit curious.”

“I am.” She cast a sidelong look at her friend. “I wish he’d come home.”

Cordé squeezed Padmé’s shoulder reassuringly. “He will. Come on, Anja and Mik are occupied and Lana’s with the younglings. We won’t find a better chance.”

Padmé hesitated a bit. “It could just be nerves; Mace asked to see me this afternoon.”

“And I’m a Sith Lord.” Cordé crossed her arms over her chest. “Come *on*, I want to know!”

Padmé was pulled along as Cordé led her across the room to the imaging computer. She sat as Cordé directed her, her eyes sparkling with mischief. “So how do we explain this one?”

Padmé grinned. “Checking on the organism?”

Cordé snickered and turned the machine on. “Relax, would you? This isn’t going to hurt you.”

Padmé couldn’t relax though. It was mid-morning, just after the regular noon hour meal — which she’d missed — and the time when most people wandered into the infirmary. “Maybe we should wait.”

“This will only take a minute. Quit squirming.”

“Cordé.”

She glanced up her smiling faltering at the worried expression on Padmé’s face. “I’ll wipe the memory and the security holos can’t read screens; relax would you? I just need to— oh!”

“What?” Padmé almost popped out of the chair in alarm.

“Sit tight, let me get this right.” Her admonishment was almost on reflex. “Oh, Padmé! You won’t... oh my!”

“What? What is it?” Fear gripped Padmé’s heart. Was the baby alright? “Cordé?”

Cordé waved her down, making a hard copy and printing it out before wiping the memory and shutting the machine down. She collected the copy and pulled Padmé all the way back to her room, ignoring the startled look Mik and Anja tossed their way. Padmé’s stomach churned again as worry and fear spread through her system. Her hand went protectively to her abdomen as Cordé pulled her inside the room and locked the door, making Padmé sit on the bed before sliding the hard copy onto her lap.

Padmé’s heart sank as he mind couldn’t first process the image. “A growth?”

Cordé laughed, shifting the image for her. “Look again.”

Padmé did, but the image didn’t register as it should have and her heart sank.

Cordé’s next words were almost unbelievable. “Twins! You’re going to have twins, Padmé!”

“Tw—” Her breath caught in her throat as the word echoed through her head. *Twins. Two babies. Twins.* She felt at a loss, her breath leaving her body in a rush as the word finally sank in. *Twins!* Her gaze went to the flimsiplast in her hands; hands that were beginning to shake. Tears blurred her eyes as, on the heels of the revelation, came the knowledge that instead of possibly losing one child, she could now lose two. Two of Anakin’s children.

Two to temple training and regulations.

She burst into tears, overwhelmed, and hugged the flimsiplast tightly to her chest.

Cordé’s arms came about her, whispering words of reassurance, though Padmé could tell she didn’t understand why the tears. She wept, clinging to the flimsiplast and Cordé, wishing she could explain but not having the voice or the air to do so.

They remained together, Cordé stroking Padmé’s hair gently, as her bout subsided almost as quickly as it started. Cordé reached for the tissues Padmé kept handy and offered them. “Here.”

Padmé blew her nose and wiped her eyes, the ache in her heart a dull echo of the ache in her throat. “Thanks.”

Cordé gently brushed Padmé’s hair back from her face. “I didn’t mean to upset you, Padmé. I thought you’d be happy.”

Padmé managed a watery smile. “I am, Cordé, but don’t you see? Anakin doesn’t even know yet and now I have *two* lives to worry about.” She stopped, taking a deep breath to steady herself. “Unless you’re going to pretend to be pregnant, the Jedi will sense it for sure.”

“They haven’t yet.”

Padmé’s hands curled protectively about her abdomen; she had only started to notice a swelling this morning when her pants had been difficult to close. Tears stung her eyes. “They will. Cordé, what am I going to do?”

Cordé kept her arm about Padmé’s shoulders. “You mean, what are *we* going to do.” Her words were firm, brokering no argument. “Anakin needs to know; he should be able to help.”

Padmé closed her eyes, a tear sliding out from under her lashes. “I can’t just broadcast it on an open link.”

“So we’ll encrypt it and send it to Artoo with instructions to give it to Anakin when he’s alone.”

Padmé’s eyes slowly opened. “I can’t do that to him, Cordé. He deserves to hear it from me, face to face.”

“Can I send him a message?”

“You?” Padmé pulled back to look at her friend. “Why would you send my husband a message?”

Cordé smiled with a wink. “Nothing untoward, I assure you. I save those for Master Kenobi.”

“Cordé!”

“Shocked?” Cordé laughed. “Good, because it made you smile. Besides, Kenobi wouldn’t look my way if I was naked and covered in chocolate sauce.”

Padmé giggled. “That was more than I needed to know.”

Cordé squeezed Padmé’s hand. “What if we get you to him?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well... the council is meeting this afternoon and I *know* you said you would meet Master Windu, but that’s probably not a good idea right now, but I could suggest some leave off planet. Maybe go home to Naboo for a while? Mik and I can handle whatever pops up. Besides, you’ve the perfect excuse.”

“Oh?”

Cordé’s grin was crafty. “The *health* of the Jedi’s best Team.”

Padmé giggled, remembering the cause for the call that had happened the previous week. “The effects will have long cleared their systems.”

“Ah, but the Jedi don’t know the secondary side effects that can kick in after two standard weeks and lead to chills, violent shivering and even seizures.”

Padmé’s eyes widened. “I don’t remember read— oh. Oh! You’re horrible.”

Cordé’s eyes sparkled. “I analyzed the sample you gave me. The two of them will be going through withdrawal symptoms for another week or so; the plant they used was fresh and in full bloom.”

“So they-?”

“Cover every lie with a truth and every truth with a lie.” She grinned unrepentantly. “I heard one of the Jedi mention the latest rumor of Grievous’ whereabouts was Naboo; so they’re going there anyway.”

Padmé's heart leapt into her throat, hope blossoming in her chest. "Really? It wouldn't be too much trouble?"

"If it helps you through this, Padmé, we'll manage whatever comes our way until your return. But," she paused and then sighed, "we'll also understand if you want to stay with your family until after the twins are born."

Padmé's heart leapt again, this time for another reason. Stay with her family? Have the twins on Naboo, away from the Temple? Possibly away from Anakin? Her heart sank at the thought and she was torn between wanting to have her children, keep them in secret, watch and help them grow, or staying in the Temple and watching them grow from afar. Her chest ached.

"I'll have to think about it."

Cordé patted her hand. "I understand. Will you at least let me ask the council if they can spare you?"

"Would you?"

"Of course."

Padmé relaxed, letting the small hope of possibly seeing Anakin warm her heart. "If you don't need me, Cordé, I think I'll take a nap. Give Master Windu my regrets?"

Cordé rose to her feet and helped tuck Padmé into bed, not mentioning the fact that the flimsiplast was locked securely in her grip. "I'll report back after my meeting. Sweet dreams Padmé. Dream of your twins, I'm sure they'll be beautiful."

A bittersweet smile crossed Padmé's face as Cordé dimmed the lights and left her to her dreams.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7

Padmé looked across the small viewing auditorium located behind one-way plexiglass later that evening and sighed. The seats were half-full, another indication of the terrible toll the war was taking on the Jedi. She seated herself with Lana, Mik and Cordé, careful to sit between two of them. The larger the collection of bodies, the better her chances at concealing the two new lives that grew within her.

She doubted she'd be able to keep the Jedi guessing for long, but she was determined to try. She'd almost foregone coming to the selections this evening, but Shala was one of those who could be chosen and she'd promised the younglings she would be there. Not just Shala, but since her coming to the Temple she'd never missed one when she was here. She wasn't about to start now.

The lights were dim in the audience chamber, the ten younglings who had been selected for possible assignment, five older and five younger, seated in a disciplined semi-circle. Their faces were calm, serene, and Padmé's heart jumped into her throat as she watched. Pride swelled in her chest.

Shala, Gil, a boy named Rian and the Rodian twins Joov and Muela were the five older children. This was Gil's last chance to be apprenticed and, while he'd been passed over several times, he didn't appear phased by it. She crossed her fingers, silently asking the Force to be kind to the children. The five younger children sat behind the older ones; not a single child was over ten; not a single one was younger than seven.

A hush fell over those waiting as Toulssa entered the chamber with the younglings. As part of her responsibilities, she had the honor of assuming the "host" position for the event. It was a momentous occasion for younglings were chosen only once a year by older Jedi. A few were assigned to specific Masters, but most were chosen in ceremonies such as this. Padmé waited for Toulssa to speak.

The older Jedi finally straightened as much as she could and looked down with something akin to pride at the younglings up for selection. She spoke slowly. "A Jedi's path is not an easy one. Because of your birthright, your heritage of power, you have been chosen to have the opportunity to walk it. There is no emotion."

"There is peace." The younglings responded as one, their young voices almost musical.

"There is no ignorance."

"There is knowledge."

Toulssa searched their faces as she spoke. "There is no passion."

"There is serenity."

One of the younger five stumbled over the words and Toulssa nodded to the shadows. One of the other younglings stepped out, going straight to the small girl and assisting her to her feet. She looked almost relieved as she was escorted from the chamber leaving only 9 younglings. Toulssa waited until they were cloaked in shadows before she continued.

“There is no chaos.”

“There is harmony.”

Toulssa pointed to Rian and cocked her finger at him. He’d faltered in his saying and was summarily dismissed, leaving eight younglings.

“There is no death.”

“There is the Force.” The last was said with conviction, the eight younglings left bound together in a unified front.

Toulssa inclined her head and semi-bowed to them. They responded in kind, but said no words. She straightened, nodding to Shala.

Shala stood, her expression one of calm, but her leku twitched nervously.

“Are you nervous, young one?”

“Yes, Master.”

“Why?”

Shala paused, gathering her thoughts before speaking. “This is an important day; a day for reflection and knowledge for today, the Force willing, I will become an apprentice and move into being what the Force wishes me to be.”

Toulssa motioned for her to sit and proceeded to ask the children the same question. Those who said “No” were immediately dismissed, cutting their number down to six. All but two of the youngest were now gone, but the remaining younglings still looked calm.

Toulssa nodded to Shala. “What are the Jedi, children?”

Shala spoke first, leading them off. “The Jedi are guardians of peace in the galaxy.”

Gil spoke next. “Jedi use their powers to defend and protect.”

The two younger children spoke next, in unison. “Jedi respect life, in any form.”

The Rodian twins spoke the last two lines, one immediately after the other. “Jedi serve others rather than ruling over them for the good of the galaxy. Jedi seek to improve themselves through knowledge and training.”

Toulssa smiled. “Well done children. Take your places; the time has come for the chosen to be called.”

The children rearranged themselves from oldest to youngest, along a painted center line in the room.

Another door opened when they were arranged, admitting five cloaked Jedi; these Jedi were those seeking Padawans.

Padmé, watching from the gallery, gripped Cordé's hand tightly. Five Jedi, six children; one would be left standing.

The first of the Jedi lifted her hand, a sultry voice sliding from the confines. "Gil Vuwn."

Gil's expression didn't change noticeably, but Padmé could see him take a deep breath, controlling himself as the elation of a long wait was over. He proudly, but with deference to his new Master, walked to her side. They left the auditorium immediately.

The next Master stepped forward. "Joov Neft."

The Rodian went proudly to join his new Master, pausing only to cast a glance at his sister before disappearing. Their relationship ended the moment he stepped from the chamber, officially becoming a Padawan learner.

Shala, Muela and the two younger Jedi, a boy name Fric and a girl named Myr, waited calmly for the other three Masters to choose.

Muela and Fric went next, each stepping beyond the threshold and leaving Shala and Myr to face the final Master alone.

The Master didn't twitch, simply waited, their hands tucked into the sleeves of their robes. Finally, she spoke, and Padmé gasped as she recognized the voice. It was one of the *last* people she'd expected to take a Padawan. "The youngling Master is correct. The path of a Jedi is not easy, the path of a Master, left with such a decision, is just as difficult."

There was a collective gasp as the Master lifted her hood and Shaak Ti's beautiful, serene face was revealed. "My Padawan needs to be capable of suffering hardship and strife; for being apprenticed to a council member is as doubly difficult as one to a Knight in the field." She calmly looked at the remaining two potential Padawans.

Shala spoke up, sensing the beginnings of fear from the younger child. "Your caution is unnecessary, Master Ti." She kept her tone low and respectful. "The life of a Jedi is difficult regardless of the path or Master chosen for us. To be apprenticed to a member of the council means to be better prepared to face those difficulties upon achieving knighthood."

Shakk Ti's lips curled into the barest of smiles. "Well said — my Padawan."

Shala bowed deferentially to her new Master.

Padmé just about jumped to her feet, barely managing to keep the cry of delight from voicing itself as Cordé clutched her hand back.

Shaak Ti and her new apprentice left the hall and Myr, the only youngling left standing, breathed a sigh of relief before spinning on her heel and walking straight into the shadows surrounding the hall.

Padmé burst to her feet and enveloped Cordé in a tight hug as the excitement of seeing Shala accepted as an apprentice — and an apprentice to a council member at that! — needed an outlet. "She did it!"

"I never doubted she would." Cordé laughed with Padmé, her friend's joy infectious. "She'll make Master Ti a wonderful apprentice."

“She will, won’t she?” Padmé looked back towards the audience chamber below, her smile still on her face as she spoke to nothingness. “Good luck, Shala. May the Force be with you.”

Chapter 8

Chapter 8

“Concerned we are, Doctor Naberrie.” Yoda told her the following morning while she was having a staff meeting. Yoda and Mace had arrived and asked to sit in. She wasn’t about to tell them no.

“I am sorry to concern you, Master Yoda.” She apologized to the Jedi with a slight inclination of her head. “That wasn’t my intent.”

“Brought forth, Nurse Cordé has, a recommendation for your health.”

Padmé felt her heart skip a beat, but managed to keep a straight face. She shot her nurse an unreadable look. “I see. Nurse Cordé is always attempting to get me away from my duties.”

“Merited it is, Doctor,” Yoda admonished gently. “Your health, suffer it has for months.”

Padmé felt a flush crawling up her neck. “I feel fine Master Yoda.” Which was true. Her stomach was still fluttering — meaning the twins were kicking — but other than that she was in good physical condition today. She felt guilty leaving her position, despite the circumstances.

Mace looked to the rest of the silent medical staff. “The Council has considered Nurse Cordé’s request for you to have some leave time away. Leave time without a mission, possibly on your home planet of Naboo.”

Padmé felt her heart plummet to her shoes. They weren’t going to send her to Anakin? *No, no*, she begged silently, careful to keep her look neutral. *Send me to Anakin, I need to see him!*

Mace met Cordé’s gaze. “Nurse Cordé has also brought it to our attention that Master Kenobi and Jedi Skywalker may be in need of some follow up care after a certain ingestion mishap of a plant that is known to this medical team. I know you are loathe to leave us, but we are in good hands until you are rested and ready to return.”

“The decision has been made?”

“I’m afraid so, Doctor Naberrie.” Mace turned a concerned look on her. “We can’t risk losing you with Grievous still on the loose. Your skills and talents have proven invaluable. We sent the missive this morning. Anakin and Obi-Wan will meet your ship one sector over and act as escort until you arrive at Naboo. This will give you the opportunity to assess their conditions and request or suggest further medical treatments if necessary.”

Padmé barely managed to keep a wide smile from forming on her face. They were sending her to see Anakin after all! She struggled to keep the elation she was feeling from them, her voice shaking a little. She hoped they’d mistake it for disappointment. “If that is the judgment of the council, I will comply.”

“It is,” Yoda told her sternly. “Return you must, on several weeks. Rest you must until then. Send for you, we will, if need of you we have.”

The Jedi Masters took their leave, instructing her to be ready to depart that afternoon. Padmé handed the meeting over to Cordé — who smiled mysteriously — and said the “serum” she would need had been packed the day before, right after the council session. Padmé hugged her friend and then hurried off to pack. Excitement raced through her veins as she stepped into her room and pulled a bag from the closet.

The smile she’d been fighting finally broke free and she laughed, spinning in a circle before hugging herself tightly. She was going to see Anakin!

“I’m coming, Anakin. I’m coming!”

She packed quickly, having been told that speed was important if she didn’t want to miss the rendezvous with Anakin and Obi-Wan. Which, of course, she didn’t. Her bag wasn’t heavy; she didn’t own many clothes and fewer still that would fit over the coming months. She packed sparingly, careful not to pack anything that was skin-tight, making a mental note to pick up what she would otherwise need when she arrived on Naboo.

The thought prompted her to record a brief message to her parents, informing them she was coming to visit for a while and had “news”. She sent it off, too preoccupied with the first rendezvous to really think about the second.

She was going to see Anakin! She couldn’t wait to tell him about their twins; the look on his face would be worth all of the pain and longing she’d suffered.

The transport blasted off the landing pad less than an hour later, Mik and Cordé having come to see her off. Cordé had brought the “serum” — a harmless collection of pain suppressants with no side effects — to ensure the validity of her errand. Mik had brought best wishes from Lana, who’d been called to attend an emergency.

They’d seen her bunked down in her cabin; a small affair with a double bed, ’fresher and small, separate sitting room. Cordé had helped pack away her things, adding two gift bags to the partially full bag with a knowing look at Padmé’s thickening waistline. She hugged her friend, wishing her luck and a happy reunion before joining Mik back on the landing pad.

Padmé was one of dozens of passengers on the transport *Skycrawler*, but the only passenger who’d been a last minute addition and the only one who would be traveling with a Jedi escort. She heard the buzz as she reentered the ship as the ramp was raised and sealed into place. The other passengers, some of them recognizing the Doctor who’d worked on several infamous cases, greeted her with a sense of awe.

Padmé felt distinctly uncomfortable around them. Her face was well known, more well known than she liked in the spotlight almost as much as Anakin’s. If he was their poster boy, she was their good luck charm. And, while Jedi didn’t believe in luck, she knew they all felt better having her around.

Guilt was quick to follow as she locked herself in her cabin. She felt guilty for leaving her post, her position and her responsibilities. Her hand rubbed her belly again, taking comfort in

the knowledge that she had yet to share, the knowledge she was eagerly looking forward to sharing, with their father. It would take almost a standard day for the *Skycrawler* to reach the rendezvous with the Jedi and Padmé settled herself on the lounge in the sitting room with a sigh.

One day.

She tilted her head back, closing her eyes, and let the dull thrum of the engines pulse through her, lulling her into a state of semi-slumber. With any luck, she'd awaken to find they were minutes from their rendezvous site. That hope was prominent in her thoughts as she drifted off to sleep.

Chapter 9

Author's Note: If you celebrate it, Happy Easter :)

Chapter 9

A chime rang somewhere in the back of her mind, drawing her reluctantly from the dreams of Anakin's warm embrace and tender touch. Her eyes were slow to open, confusion prominent as she tried to place the strange designs and sounds around her. This wasn't her — oh! Padmé sat bolt upright, the last vestiges of sleep tumbling away as she remembered where she was — and why.

The chime sounded again, announcing her visitor for the second time. She pushed off the lounge, taking a moment to stretch and then checked her appearance briefly in the looking glass she could see in the 'fresher. She adjusted her clothes, ensuring they didn't pull too tightly against her abdomen, and then turned towards the door.

Was that Anakin? Her heart fluttered nervously, with anticipation as she hesitated, her hand over the door activation panel. Would he be happy about their children? Her stomach fluttered again and she took a deep breath to calm herself.

The chime sounded a third time and Padmé hit the activation switch. The door slid open with a hiss, and Padmé opened her mouth in greeting only to stop in surprise and disappointment.

It wasn't Anakin.

Her smile faltered. "May I help you?"

A young woman, no more than eighteen years old, stood in front of Padmé, wringing her hands together, her green eyes darting back and forth nervously. "A-are you Doctor Naberrie?"

Alarm bells went off in Padmé's mind, her professional instincts for trouble warning her that something was amiss. "I am."

The relieved look on the girl's face would have been comical but for the desperation it revealed. "Thank the Force! Can you come?"

"Come where?"

"My mother's had an accident and she'll lose the baby if you don't help! You will come won't you?" Her green eyes pleaded, begging silently — desperately — for help

Vacation be damned. Padmé didn't even pause. "Let me grab my bag."

The girl's mother was in the ship's small infirmary, the medical droid attempting to stem the bleeding on a sever gash in her abdomen. An abdomen that was distended in the last months of pregnancy; the amniotic sac visible through the thin layer of muscle and sinew that hadn't been penetrated.

Padmé stepped up, pulling on gloves and immediately pushing the droid out of the way. "What happened?"

The younger girl was wringing her hands together again. "My step-father accused her of being unfaithful. He said... said he wasn't going to support another brat that wasn't his."

Padmé's blood ran cold, her hands already moving across the tight skin of the woman's stomach. "Where is he now?"

"The Captain arrested him. I think they put him in the brig."

Padmé felt the baby inside the woman moving, but there were few signs of life from the woman herself. She was deathly pale, her breathing shallow and uneven, and Padmé knew with certainty there was more to this situation than she was being told. "Lift her up."

The medical droid beeped in protest.

Padmé rounded on it, her eyes flashing fire. "I said, lift her up. I am Doctor Naberrie, currently assigned to the Jedi Temple. Do it!"

The droid, not programmed to be intimidated, but programmed with an up to date list of physicians and their assignments, complied.

Padmé circled the woman and found what she was looking for. "You, girl, if you want your mother to live, open my bag; There is a needle and thread on a sterilized bag. Bring it here."

Padmé's commanding tone snapped the girl into action. Within moments the needle was in Padmé's hands and her fingers were inside a puncture wound on the woman's back, dangerously close to her heart. Using magnification tools inside the rudimentary infirmary, Padmé worked quickly, acutely aware of the lack of assistants. The girl tried, but several times she handed her the wrong tools.

Padmé squared her jaw and ignored the unfortunate circumstance and tied off the first of the completed stitches. She didn't pause, trusting herself, her skill, that the stitches would hold and quickly moved backwards until only the exterior needed to be closed.

She didn't bother. With the woman still being propped by the droid, she went to work on the slash in the woman's abdomen, quickly binding muscle and sinew back together in its protective embrace over the amniotic sac. The needle quickly ran out of thread and Padmé held her hand out to the girl. "There's a spool of thread in the same location. Thread this, and quickly."

The girl did as instructed, following the instructions as a drone follows orders, and Padmé could see that she was on the verge of shock. So she began talking. "That's right, you'll want to use the length of your arm for a measure. Now thread the needle. Good. Now, use the sheers in the bottom of the bag to cut — good. Now, come over here and push. I need you to put her hands on either side of this gash and hold it together so I can work."

It worked. Padmé's running litany kept the girl active and thinking, and following instructions. Padmé, grateful for any help in such a difficult case, kept up her stream of words, careful to keep her tone soothing and neutral, different from her orders of earlier.

With the girl's help, the gash in the woman's abdomen was quickly closed. Padmé slapped bacta patches on the sealed wounds to ensure they'd heal more quickly and then proceeded to dress the rest of the woman's injuries. A bruised head, mind cuts to her hands and face, as well as three broken ribs.

Finally, less than forty minutes since she'd started, Padmé stepped back. The ship didn't have a bacta tank, which is where the woman should have been placed, so Padmé gave the droid instructions and her personal comlink number. If there were any changes, she wanted to know.

The girl fussed over her mother, ensuring the small bed the droid assigned her was comfortable, pulling up a blanket, and adjusting the temperature controls to keep her warm. The woman's color was still pale and Padmé knew the next step would likely be a transfusion. But she was out of danger for the time being. Only time would tell if she'd recover.

Padmé pulled off her gloves, looking around for a sanitization unit but didn't see one. She sighed, disposing of her gloves and then began disinfecting her tools. After each was completed, she placed it to the side and back inside its sterile compartment. Once finished, she moved back to the girl and her patient, smiling slightly as she gently, gingerly, placed her fingers on the woman's large belly. The baby was still moving — a good sign — and had dropped into the position for birth. This woman would likely have her baby soon; what had possessed her attacker to wait until now?

"Doctor Naberrie, I can't thank you enough." The girl's eyes swam with tears, her mother's hand clenched firmly between both of hers.

"She's not completely out of danger yet." Padmé felt obligated to warn the girl that her mother still might not pull through. Without a bacta tank, Padmé privately gave her less than a fifty percent chance of recovery. "She's very weak and unless we can get her to a bacta tank, infection could still set in."

The girl smiled tumultuously. "She didn't have that chance before you came. Without your expertise she'd be dead by now."

Padmé covered the girl's hands with her own. "What's your name?"

"Mira."

"Mira. That's a lovely name." Padmé squeezed her hands. "Well, Mira, the droid is programmed to administer the care your mother will need. My biggest concern is the amount of blood. She's lost and this infirmary doesn't look like it's equipped to do plasma transfusions."

The droid beeped, informing her in its own way, that she was incorrect.

Padmé smiled slightly. "I'm wrong on occasion. Can you be a donor, Mira?"

“Anything.”

Padmé nodded to the droid as this was one function it was apparently programmed for. The droid worked efficiently, quickly hooking up tubes and needles to Mira and her mother before starting the cycle for extracting plasma from blood. Mira flinched but didn’t complain as the blood traveled through the tubs and into the droid. The droid’s lights flashed as Padmé watched and a yellowish fluid that was almost clear came out the other end, straight into Mira’s mother.

Confident the droid knew what it was doing, Padmé squeezed Mira’s hand. “The droid knows how to get in touch with me, but if you need me, you know where to find me.”

Mira’s relieved look said everything Padmé needed to know. Patting the girl on the shoulder, she took her leave and headed back to her suite.

She had just stepped out of the sonic shower when the chime for her suite rang again. She grabbed her robe, a slight smile on her face. Mira must have come seeking her out once the transfusion was complete. Her bag was by the door just in case of another emergency. She frowned. If it was another emergency she couldn’t very well go in her robe.

“Just a minute!” She called to the door. “I’ll be right there!”

Padmé grabbed the first clean outfit she put her hands on; a pair of comfortable slacks and a short-sleeved shirt that had a high waist and no collar. She shook her head as she quickly pulled it on, not bothering with socks, and darted back towards the door as the chime rang a second time. A glance at the chronometer told her they were still several hours off from the Jedi rendezvous point and Mira was the only one she knew on the ship.

Mira. She chuckled, palming open the door with a shake of her head. “Mira, yo—”

Her eyes widened and she sucked in a sharp breath, beginning to tremble; not quite believing her eyes.

A roguish smile spread across the face of her visitor. “Hello, Angel.”

Chapter 10

Chapter 10

“Anakin.” She breathed his name, reaching for him in the same moment he reached for her.

She was swept into his arms for an exuberant hug and propelled back into her small cabin. The door closed behind them as Anakin’s lips sought hers. Padmé melted against him, her hands twining in his hair as she returned his kiss. Every ounce of her longing from the last few months was channeled into that kiss, telling him without words just how much she’d missed him.

They separated reluctantly, his hands traveling over her shoulders, back and arms as if not quite believing she was real; she couldn’t blame him when hers were doing the same. “Oh, Anakin, I’ve missed you so much.”

Padmé was pulled into another, tight hug, his lips seeking and finding her collar bone. “I’ve missed you too, Padmé. I thought this mission would never bring me back to you.”

She closed her eyes, reveling in his touch, his kisses, as he reacquainted himself with the soft curves of her cheeks, throat and shoulders. The tension of the last few months melted away with a soft sigh in those first, precious moments of their reunion. Other kinds of tension had replaced it; sexual, for she couldn’t be around Anakin without wanting him, and anticipation as she was anxiously trying to find the words to tell him of his impending fatherhood.

Would he be happy?

He must have sensed a change in her demeanor, for he pulled back, slowly, looking down into her face. She could almost see his concern. “Padmé? What’s wrong?”

“I...” Swallowing hard to muster her courage, she spoke softly after a moment’s hesitation. “Ani... I’m pregnant.”

The look on his face was all she’d hoped for. His jaw went slack, shock and excitement flicking through his eyes as he stared at her. The smile that finally curved his lips was tender, joyous; exuberant. And yet, he echoed the word as if not quite believing it. “Pregnant?”

She nodded, searching his gaze for any hint of reluctance.

“You’re sure?”

Padmé blushed, nodding again.

“That’s... that’s...” he stopped, leaning down to kiss her. “Really?”

Unable to help herself, she laughed softly at his almost child-like joy. “Really. What are we going to do?”

“Do?” He echoed her words, pulling back surprise. “Nothing. Padmé. Not a thing. This baby’s a blessing.”

She smiled up at him, standing on tip-toe to wrap her arms around his neck again. He pulled her close, closer than before, so she was flush against him, his lips warm on the curve of her neck. He whispered her name almost reverently. She closed her eyes, inhaling the scents that clung to him, the smell that was uniquely his and stuck to her pillow whenever he was with her. Anakin didn’t let her go for long minutes, his head staying where it was, and she could feel him relishing the contact, the feel of her body flush against his. She felt the same way and was almost disappointed when he finally pulled back, his hands the only part of him to remain touching her.

“How long have you known?”

“A couple of weeks after we returned from Dantooine.”

His eyes widened. “That was almost two months ago!”

“I know.”

Anakin smoothed her hair back from her face and then, resolutely, swept her into his arms. He carried her the few steps it took to get to the bedroom and then gently, tenderly, deposited her on the bed. “How are you feeling?”

“I’m fine, really.” She squeezed his shoulder, her hands still wrapped around his neck; he hadn’t let her go once she was on the bed and she wasn’t about to let him escape now that he was here.

His hand drifted, sliding down her side and making her shiver, before settling low on her abdomen where it was starting to swell. “You’re carrying my — our — baby, Padmé, are you sure?”

She covered his hand with her own, knowing the time was right to share the rest of the news. “Babies.”

“Babies?”

Still feeling the euphoria of that revelation, she nodded. Sharing that joy with him made it all the sweeter. “Cordé confirmed it yesterday; we’re going to have twins!”

Anakin blinked like she’d punched him and she swore she saw his eyes cross. His hand spammed where it rested over her belly. And then he was tilting her backwards, pressing her against the soft mattress as his lips claimed her again, hungrily devouring, gently worshiping. Without a thought or word of protest, she gave herself up to the magic of his kiss.

Sometime later, Padmé’s fingers idly traced a design on Anakin’s bare chest, her head on his shoulder. His arms were around her loosely, thought his hand kept wandering to the swell of her abdomen as if he were unable to believe the news and needed the scant physical evidence her body produced.

“Are you thinking good thoughts, Anakin?”

His arms tightened fractionally. "I can't think anything but good thoughts with you in my arms, Angel." He turned his head to kiss her forehead. "Are you?"

She sighed contentedly. "I'm not thinking much of anything right now."

He chuckled. "I'll take that as a compliment, my good Doctor."

"You should." She poked him before going back to her doodling.

They were quiet, basking in one another's presence for long minutes, before Anakin reluctantly pushed himself into a sitting position. Padmé propped her head up on her elbow and looked at him, the sheet draped loosely about her body. "What's wrong?"

Anakin was silent, looking beyond her to where their clothing lay scattered about the floor. His lips twitched. "I think Obi-Wan would have something to say if he wandered in right now."

Padmé followed his gaze and grinned. Her shirt was hanging over the door; his was half-way off the end of the bed. He did raise an interesting point though, and she looked back to him curiously. "Where is Obi-Wan?"

"On his way to the rendezvous point. Artoo helped me with a little creative navigation; Obi-Wan thinks I came because my shivers got so bad." He shivered for effect, miming being really cold. He slid back down, rolling to face her, nose to nose. "It was partially true."

"You don't look cold to me."

"Not anymore." He agreed, taking her hand. He placed it over his heart. "But I get this ache right here when we're separated that drives me to shake. I think I've come down with something; could it be fatal, Doc?"

"Only in extreme cases. People rarely die from a battered heart."

His fingers squeezed hers. "Is there a cure?"

She leaned forward. "Tender." Her lips brushed over his cheek. 'Loving.' And across his forehead. "Care." Whisper soft over his lips and his breath hitched. "It's the only known cure."

"I think I need a prescription."

Pushing him onto his back mischievously, she smiled smugly. "I don't do prescriptions; only direct administration."

"Then don't waste any time," going along with her tease, Anakin fell back willingly, leaving her sprawled across his chest. "I'm dying here, Doc."

"Not for long."

They were seated together cuddling several hours later, thoroughly reluctant to move from the bed, but each knowing they needed to. The rendezvous time was fast approaching and with it, Obi-Wan's arrival. It meant Anakin would be bunked with the older Jedi, or nearby, and their private time would be snatched in moments of secrecy.

Anakin was the first to move, heaving a heavy sigh as he released her reluctantly and shifted, dangling his feet over the edge of the bed. He didn't want to leave, Padmé could see that clearly in every posture, every movement, as he collected his tunic and leggings. She watched him as he dressed, enjoying it almost as much as when he'd removed his clothes, despite the ache in her chest.

"Do you have to leave so soon, love?"

"You know I do." Anakin knelt next to the bed in only his leggings, reaching out to caress her cheek again. "Obi-Wan will think it suspect if he arrives and I haven't a clue where we're going to be bunked and haven't stowed my gear."

"But you haven't even gotten your treatment yet."

His look was as amused as it was sad. "Nothing you could give me would be as soothing or restoring as your touch, Padmé. You can come with me if you'd like, to help me put my things away."

She arched her eyebrows. "You travel light."

"Can you blame a guy for wanting to spend some time with his wife?" His grin was unrepentant. "I'd really enjoy your company. Then you can tell me all about how Cordé was the one who confirmed the twins."

Padmé accepted his hand out of the bed, sliding her arms around his waist and briefly resting her head against his chest. Anxiety struck her. "You're not angry, are you?"

He rubbed her bare back, gently stroking her hair. "Cordé's proven her discretion but something tells me you didn't tell her and she somehow found out on her own."

Padmé released him, collecting her pants and shirt and feeling his eyes on her. Pretending not to notice, she used the opportunity to dress slowly, languidly, running the fabric up over her hips. Doing up her belt deliberate notch by deliberate notch before picking up her shirt. She pulled it down slowly, the fabric whispering against the curves of her breasts; breasts that had begun to swell due to her condition. Anakin inhaled sharply as the shirt settled around her waist and she plastered an innocent smile on her face, reaching for a pair of socks.

Laughter erupted from between her lips as Anakin grabbed her about the hips and brought her back to the bed. Her laughter turned into sighs of pleasure as he undid her handy work, his lips tracing the lines her fingers had drawn. Without so much of a hint of hesitation, or protest for lost time, he joined her once more.

"I can't thank you enough for intervening in this matter, Doctor. We really aren't equipped to deal with that kind of emergency."

"It was nothing, Captain." Smiling graciously at the Captain of the *Skycrawler*, Padmé inclined her head. "I couldn't very well have said no with such a desperate situation."

"You weren't obligated to help; Master Yoda himself told me I was to ensure you had a restful trip."

"I find it relaxing to look after other people; it's one of the reasons I became a Doctor. How's the patient today?"

"Resting comfortably. Her daughter, Mira, enlisted two other women to help give her plasma. Thanks to your efforts, we won't lose her or the baby."

"I'm relieved to hear that. The stress of the attack could easily have caused a premature birth."

The Captain chuckled. "I think that baby's ready anyway, Doctor. I hate to ask, but a report on the wounds she suffered from a decorated physician such as yourself would go a long way to locking her estranged husband up for the rest of his miserable life."

Padmé pulled a datapad out of her pocket. "I anticipated as much Captain. I trust this is suffice."

Skimming through the first few lines of the report, the Captain blanched and turned it off, tucking it into a pocket. "That will... will.." he swallowed hard.

Padmé waited patiently; some reports, like the one she'd written, were hard for the squeamish to stomach.

The Captain cleared his throat and tried again. "That will be just fine, Doctor. Mira's asked if you could drop by and see them today as her mother's finally regained consciousness."

"I'll stop by on my way to see Jedi Skywalker. Good day, Captain."

Leaving the small lounge reserved for the ship's personnel shaking her head, Padmé found she was more amused than frustrated by the current turn of events. She'd been unofficially dubbed the ship's Doctor for the trip and the Captain had given her unrestricted access to the whole ship. It was a nice gesture and one she took full advantage off. She'd first checked out the monitoring station, making careful note of the blind spots in the security cams. Using that knowledge allowed her to evade detection when she and Anakin were in hallways and the urge to "jump him" became too great.

A sensuous smile curved her lips. She'd lost count of the various places around the ship where they'd made love.

Keeping away from Obi-Wan had proven to be easy. The Jedi Master had apparently ingested quite a bit of Anakin's concoction and was still suffering from withdrawal symptoms. Padmé had placed him in the infirmary with Mira's mother so the droid could monitor his condition. That had been two days ago and they were now closer to Naboo than before.

"Good morning, Angel." An arm snaked about her waist, warm lips sliding into her hair by her temple.

She turned into his embrace. This was one location he was frequently accosting her in; several meters shy of the entrance door back to the main areas of the ship and the infirmary. Melting against him as his hands tucked under the hem of her loose shirt to splay against the bare flesh of her back, her words were a purr. "Mmm... good morning, Anakin."

He chuckled softly, his lips tracing the line of her jaw. "You're a wanton, my love."

“Only with you.” She gasped as he nipped at her ear. “Did you sleep well?”

“I sleep better with my wife in my arms.” His volume was barely a whisper, his breath feathering across her cheek. “You never joined me last night.”

“I couldn’t.”

He leaned back against the wall of the small alcove, looking down at her, but leaving their bodies aligned from hip to foot. She had no illusions as to her effect on him; the thought, despite the last three days — or perhaps because of it — was all the more thrilling. That didn’t stop her from shifting in a way she knew would make him groan.

He didn’t disappoint her. “You’re killing me woman. Why couldn’t you come?”

She blushed. “I wanted to, but the twins had other ideas.”

“Oh?”

Her blush deepened. “I spent most of my night in the ’fresher after all that water you had me drinking yesterday.”

Anakin laughed, a low chuckle that spread fire through her system just as his fingers left trails of promise across her skin. He ducked his head, stopping just shy of kissing her. “Serves me right. Sorry Angel, I’ll be sure to avoid that in the future.”

She tugged the front of his tunic drawing them together and sighed against his lips as he kissed her. His fingers slid under the waist band of her loose leggings and she reluctantly pulled away, reaching one hand back to still his. “I can’t.”

His brow furrowed in concern. “I want you, Padmé. Badly.”

“You always want me badly.”

He growled. “Is that a problem, woman?”

She giggled at the intense look on his face, cupping her hand with the one that wasn’t twining about his fingers. “Never. I feel the same. But, I’ve been named ship’s Doctor and asked to see patients today.”

Anakin’s head slumped forward until he was resting his forehead against hers. “But I’m a patient.”

“There’s nothing wrong with you.”

He slid the hand that was entwined with his up to cover his head. “I need my daily dose of tender loving care, remember?”

“You can come with me.” Despite caving to that plea, her offer was mostly for her own sake. “I won’t be too long.”

“Promise?”

Padmé nodded at his eager expression. “I promise. Short of Mira’s mother going into labor, nothing could keep me away!”

Chapter 11

Chapter 11

“Ugghhh!”

“Push, Ally, push.” Padmé brushed a sweat soaked bang from her face, looking up into the strained face of the woman on the birthing table.

Ally, Mira’s mother, screamed once before gritting her teeth and bearing down again.

Padmé found herself wishing fervently for Lana. She’d never delivered a baby, though she’d been trained how, and now, facing the prospect, a part of her was terrified that both mother and child would perish. Keeping a tight reign on that fear, she used it to motivate Ally, and offer instruction.

The labor had started shortly after her trip to the infirmary, and she’d been in the process of disrobing her magnificent looking husband when the frantic call had come in. Anakin had been frustrated, but understanding, when she’d been forced to leave. It was a situation out of his control.

That had been ten hours ago.

Now, the infirmary smelled of sweat and blood as Ally’s contractions had ripped open the nicely healing scabs and caused them to leak. Padmé had done what she could for the pain, but any significant amount of pain killer had the potential to harm the baby. So she waited and then, inspired, she’d called on Obi-Wan’s help.

Stuck in the infirmary himself, Obi-Wan made the perfect candidate to hold Ally’s hand since Mira had proved uselessly scatter brained with the idea of a sibling entering the world. The side benefit was that Obi-Wan, under the influence of the “antidote” Cordé had prepared, was able to help Ally control her pain. He was also able to distract her by telling her funny stories about the adventures he and Anakin had been on.

Padmé had listened avidly, charmed by the fond way Obi-Wan spoke of her husband.

Yet, nothing was helping now that Ally’s contractions were less than a minute apart. Padmé’s back ached, her shoulders were sore and her stomach was growling, making it perfectly clear that she needed to eat.

But she didn’t dare.

Not with everything racing towards the baby’s birth.

“Something’s wrong!” Ally’s cry was punctuated by tears and sobbing as her body fought to bear the babe. “Something’s wrong! I can feel it!”

Padmé placed her hands on the woman’s belly and felt, pushing firmly. The baby had stopped moving. She acted immediately, quickly and efficiently, before she could think twice, doing a caesarean on the woman.

In what felt like hours, but likely took only moments, Padmé had the baby in her grasp. The cord was around its neck, his skin held a bluish tint and he had no pulse. Padmé quickly cut the cord and pulled it from around the baby's neck. *What do I do now?* The thought echoed in her mind as she fought to remember the basic training from almost fifteen years ago. Training she now needed to save the baby's life.

Breathe.

The word echoed in her mind. She looked to where Ally was sobbing, her body in the process of expelling the rest of the birthing fluids. Padmé squared her shoulders, probed the baby's mouth to remove any blockages or hindrances and then began to breathe into his mouth. Long forgotten exercises that had been drilled into her head came back as she fought to bring the baby back from the brink.

She breathed for him, tested his pulse and then breathed for him again. *Come on, come on! Live! I know you want to live!*

Time ceased to exist as Padmé focused solely on the baby.

Breathe.

In.

Out.

Chest compressions.

Breathe.

In.

Out.

More chest compressions.

Several long and tense minutes passed. Padmé kept her rhythm, the little voice in the back of her brain marking the time as the minutes ticked by without a response. Finally, exhausted and numb, Padmé finally lifted her head and looked at the weeping woman before her. She'd been trying for ten minutes and the baby hadn't responded. *If they haven't responded by then, the voice of her teacher echoed ominously in the back of her mind. Then the patient is clinically brain dead.*

Her eyes swam with tears. "I'm sorry, Ally. There's nothing I can do."

"No!" Ally's cry was broken. "Give him here, let me hold my Lux!"

Padmé wrapped the baby in the waiting cloth and handed him to his mother. Ally held the baby close, but the limbs were limp, no breath passing through his lips; no heart beating in his chest. She cried brokenly over the body of the babe as Padmé watched, numb to the core.

Ten hours.

Ten hours for heartbreak.

The woman was still bleeding, and Padmé acted on reflex only, moving to stop the bleeding, her brain feeling as numb as her heart. She'd been unable to save the babe. The

words and her failure resounded through her, rocking her to the core as her hands systematically sealed the woman's flesh together.

When Padmé took note of her surroundings next she was in her room, didn't remember leaving the infirmary, and standing in the 'fresher, her hands in the sink, staring at them blankly. They were covered in blood and amniotic fluid. She scrubbed them, using some the precious water allocated to her for the purpose, scrubbing them until her hands were almost raw, aching from the harsh treatment.

She'd failed.

Lifting her head, she caught sight of her image in the looking glass; an image she didn't recognize.

"Padmé? Are you alright?"

Tears blurred her vision again at Anakin's soft inquiry. She hadn't heard him come in, hadn't heard his footsteps, but that fact that he was there was enough. Unthinkingly, she turned, stepping directly into his strong embrace, numb to the core.

He stroked her hair, not fully comprehending what was the matter; he'd only come at Obi-Wan's request after his old Master had seen Padmé leave the infirmary in a daze and hadn't been present for the ordeal with Ally. "Padmé?"

His gentle tone cracked the numbness and agony, almost too painful to bear, slid through. Padmé let out a soft, shuddering sob, feeling his arms tighten around her. He held her firmly as, slowly, piece by piece, the numbness slipped away and the terrible weight of her failure buckled her knees. But for his embrace, she would have collapsed as she turned her face and cried brokenly into Anakin's shoulder.

She cried for Ally, for the pain of losing a child.

She cried for the child, who'd not had a chance to live.

And she cried for herself.

For the loss of a battle that struck too close to home. For in Ally's pregnancy her worst fears for her own had been realized. Padmé cried so hard that she cried herself to sleep.

Sleep brought no ease.

Padmé woke the following morning with a heavy heart, a lump in her throat and eyes that felt like sand. She felt awful, as if the loss of the child had been her own. She curled, wrapping her arms about her slightly swollen belly to reassure herself that nothing bad had happened to her own child. That nothing had caused her to lose hers when she'd been unable to save another's.

The bed dipped, a gentle hand coming to rest on her shoulder and brushing her hair from her face. Concerned blue eyes the color of the Nabooian summer skies looked down at her tenderly. She tried to smile and failed.

"Good morning, Angel."

Padmé winced at his nickname, turning her face away so that her hair fell forward to hide sudden tears.

Angel.

An Angel of Death maybe.

Anakin's hands were gentle as he settled onto the bed completely, stretching out his length to curl up next to her. He was warmth when she didn't feel she'd ever be warm again. His hands gently rubbed her back, smoothed her hair and stroked her cheek. Slowly the pain receded and she opened her eyes again. Anakin was looking at her with silent understanding. "You're not, you know."

"I'm not what?"

"An Angel of Death. Obi-Wan tells me you did everything humanly possible to help that little boy."

Padmé squeezed her eyes shut again, the image of those tiny pale, blue lips coming immediately to mind. "Not enough."

His lips brushed a whisper soft kiss over her cheek. "Loss is a natural part of life, Padmé. As a Doctor that shouldn't be a big surprise. We lose Jedi who are beyond help daily with the war the way it is."

"That's different." She looked at him. "Those Jedi *choose* to put their lives on the line. They *choose* to be placed in danger to help restore peace to the galaxy. That baby was innocent. He wasn't given the choice; he never had the ability to choose. Where's the fairness in *that*?"

"There isn't any." Compassion laced Anakin's tone. "That baby deserved to die no more than any youngling in the temple does. But it happens. There will always be circumstances beyond our control — even if we don't like it."

Padmé curled her hands around her abdomen. "What... what if that happens to our twins, Anakin? What if... what if there's a complication and we lose them both?"

"There won't be." He smiled confidently, covering her hands with one of his own. "I have a wife who takes care of herself and knows all the right things to do to prevent complications. She's surrounded, normally anyway, by equally competent friends and one of which who specializes in the neo-natal area. I can't think of any other group who are better qualified to prevent complications like that one — or detect them in time to prevent something like this from occurring."

Padmé inhaled deeply, drawing strength from his assurances. Needing it in the face of her own faltering spirit. "Lana doesn't know yet."

Anakin smile roguishly. "Then we'll have to tell her."

"But—"

He placed a finger against her lips, silencing her protest. "I know it puts what we have at risk, my love, but better to risk the idea of discovery than the health of our children. I don't want to lose you, Padmé and I don't want to lose them either."

She finally rolled onto her back, staring up into his eyes as he looked down at her. Braced on one arm above her, his hair hung down about his face. His tender expression made her heart swell. “You’re right, of course. Maybe I shouldn’t spend too much time on Naboo.”

Anakin chuckled, brushing a strand of hair from her face. “Spend all the time you need; I know you miss your family — even if you can’t tell them the truth about us.”

“I won’t have to,” Padmé smiled sadly. “They’ll know.”

“What do you mean?”

Padmé reached up to slide her hand along his jaw, cradling his face in her palm. “My mother and sister have both had children. They’ll know.”

His brow knotted. “But—”

Padmé laughed softly, feeling her spirits lift with the release. She wasn’t beyond her grief over losing the baby yet, but she had started the healing process thanks to him. “I’ll do my best to hide it, but if they come out and ask I won’t be able to hide the truth. Not about the babies, anyway.”

“And me?”

“I made you a promise. I won’t break that. If you choose to tell my parents, I will honor that choice and so will they, but I won’t be responsible for a decision that could ruin your career.”

Anakin leaned down, kissing her gently. “I don’t expect you to lie for me or about me, Angel.”

“You know we have to.”

“That doesn’t mean I like putting you in that position.”

“I knew what I was getting myself into, Anakin. I didn’t enter into this marriage without the knowledge that the people I love, other than you, won’t be able to share in our joys. I knew that. I knew that when I first found out about the twins; I knew that when I said yes. Regrets are useless, my love, unless you regret what we have.”

“Never.” His lips worshiped her slowly, deliberately, drawing a sigh from her. “You?”

A smile curved her lip. “Never.”

Anakin mirrored her smile and pulled back. “Good. If I come with you, do you think you’ll be able to see Mira and her mother? They’ve been asking for you this morning.”

Padmé’s smile died, the sadness seeping back in. Anakin remained where he was, gently stroking her cheek with the back of his fingers, letting her know that she wasn’t alone. “I guess I’d better.” She swallowed hard. “I’m frightened, Ani.”

“Courage is not facing up to your fears, but admitting you have them.” He reached for her hand, linking their fingers together. “I’ll be right there beside you, love, no matter how disapproving Master Obi-Wan gets.”

“Promise?”

“I promise.”

There was no doubting him when he sealed the bargain with a kiss.

Padmé entered the medical bay under her own power, her hands folded tightly together in front of her. Anakin had one reassuring hand on her shoulder.

Obi-Wan, still under recovery, looked up at their entry. His gaze went from Padmé to Anakin and he quirked an eyebrow. Anakin minutely shook his head. Padmé barely registered it, looking beyond to where Mira and Ally were still sitting in the same bed. The droids had disposed of the birthing fluids and mess, having readjusted Ally’s bed after Padmé’s impromptu departure. The droids had done what Padmé herself had been unable to and for that she was grateful.

A small bundle, shrouded by a blanket, lay in Ally’s lap.

Padmé moved directly to the woman. Ally’s face was pale and drawn; she didn’t look like she’d slept a wink. Beside her, Mira was almost as pale, her eyes swollen from weeping. Padmé stopped just beyond the privacy ring, not wanting to intrude. Ally met her gaze first, her eyes swimming with pain. But Padmé could also see acceptance underneath. Ally had been forced to accept the reality that her son wasn’t going to live. Ally extended a silent hand to her, beckoning the Doctor closer.

Padmé moved in and Ally grasped her hands, pulling her close before enveloping her in a hug. “Thank you for trying to save my baby.”

Eyes flooding with tears at the soft, broken words that held so much emotion, Padmé’s response came out choked. “I’m sorry I couldn’t do more.”

“You did everything humanly possible, Doctor.” Ally squeezed her tightly before letting her go. “I thank you for that. Without it, Lux would never have had any chance.”

Padmé’s throat closed and she pulled Ally close for another hug. Ally pulled Mira in, including the younger woman in the embrace. Padmé didn’t say anything, didn’t have to, as tears slid down her cheeks. Her shoulders felt wet as Ally and Mira’s tears overflowed and soaked her shirt. Clinging together, they vented their grief and the healing truly began.

Author’s Note: I feel obligated to mention that this story was written, and *completed*, long before Lux Bonteri arrived on the scene in TCW; the Lux mentioned here was not inspired in any way, shape or form by the character of a show that hadn’t yet been *conceived* when this story was finished.

That is all — thanks for reading ;)

Chapter 12

Chapter 12

Obi-Wan was up and about and almost completely recovered during the last two days of the trip to Naboo. He'd taken it upon himself to help Ally and Mira through their grief, leaving Padmé in Anakin's capable hands.

That did not, however, mean Obi-Wan's attention was diverted.

Anakin and Padmé were forced to be cordial to one another, stealing but moments for kisses and caresses in the darkest corners of the ship for fear of being discovered. Anakin managed to be nearby with the excuse of Padmé's grief over the failure in losing Ally's baby, but Obi-Wan watched them closely, almost suspiciously, as if he *knew* what was going on.

Upon landing at Naboo, Obi-Wan was taken aside by Ally and Mira and covered in an excessive number of hugs. Embarrassed and taken aback, it allowed Anakin to dawdle and give Padmé a lingering kiss of farewell out of sight of prying eyes.

It was almost bittersweet, knowing the time had come to part once again. As she kiss broke, Padmé sighed softly, resting her head on his chest and listening to his heart beat as she did so. "Anakin?"

He held her securely, not willing to relinquish their small amount of time together. "Yes, my love?"

"Is there any way you can escape Obi-Wan? Any way at all?"

"I could," he chuckled sadly, the sound rumbling through his chest, "but not without raising suspicions."

She sighed again, the sound of his heart beating reassuringly steady under her ear. Inhaling the scent of him, Padmé relishing the feel of his arms about her. "I don't want to go."

"I don't want you to go either." His admission was soft. "But I promise I'll be back to escort you home to Coruscant — unless you decide to have them here."

"Much as I want to, I couldn't." Tightly squeezing him, she reluctantly stepped away. Her hands trailed down his arms, linking their fingers together as she was unable to relinquish the connection to him just yet. "Cordé would never forgive me."

Anakin's answering smile was tinged with sadness as his thumbs brushed gently over the backs of her hands. He looked beyond her, his hands dropping from hers reluctantly, and stepped back. Even as his hands fell to their sides, leaving her bereft, she could see the control the action took, knowing what had to have caused the shift. His formal tone and words confirmed it.

"Is this everything, Doctor?"

Padmé stiffened, straightening her shoulders and burying the pain of separation deep in her heart. She'd cry later. For now she couldn't let Obi-Wan see it. "I travel light, Jedi Skywalker. You're kind to carry my bag."

"Anything for you, Padmé." He hefted the bags in his hands. "Of course, Master Obi-Wan could be a gentleman and lend a hand."

"Too heavy for you, my friend?" Obi-Wan's amused voice came from behind her and she turned. He inclined his head to her. "You did well, Doctor. Thank you for such a thoughtful medication."

"Thank Cordé, Master Kenobi; it was her idea."

Obi-Wan looked at her thoughtfully but was stopped from saying anything further as Anakin bumped him with a bag. "Sorry Master. They're a little awkward."

The look Obi-Wan shot Anakin said he wasn't fooled.

Padmé stepped in. "My transport will be waiting this way."

Obi-Wan and Anakin followed her, Obi-Wan taking one of the bags Anakin tossed his way with good humor; the attention of Mira and her mother appeared to have loosened him up a little. Perhaps he just needed a woman? Padmé led them to the waiting ground transport and directed them to put the bags in the back didn't take long and then the final parting from her husband was upon them again.

Turning to them as the hatch closed, she folded her hands together in front of her. "Good luck with your mission, gentlemen. I thank you for the escort and am glad it was unnecessary."

"It was our pleasure." Anakin's eyes glittered knowingly and Padmé barely managed to keep a blush from her cheeks.

Obi-Wan inclined his head to her. "Doctor. Enjoy your vacation.

"May the Force be with you, Master Kenobi. And you, Anakin. You'll need it to track Grievous I hear."

"We're closer than he thinks, Doctor."

Padmé watched them go, Anakin turning back to look at her once, briefly, his heart in his eyes. The heat of a silent promise warming her even as her heart ached with longing. *He has to leave*, she told herself silently. *If he doesn't, he jeopardizes everything.*

"Miss?"

Padmé turned to look at the transport pilot and managed to find a smile. She should have been overjoyed she was going to see her parents; that she was going home. But, as she slid into the transport, she thought of her mother's old adage.

Home is where the heart is.

Her gaze went back to the direction in which Anakin had disappeared and her heart ached. It was true; *home* was wherever Anakin was.

Naboo, her parent's home or the Temple were just a place to sleep.

Heat.

Smoke.

Lungs burning, her throat was tight as the awareness of her surroundings was slow to return. Head pounding, she felt something sticky trickling over her cheek. She groaned, feeling as if someone had battered her body with a big stick. Every muscle, every fiber down to her bones *ached*.

Padmé's eyes opened slowly.

Dancing flames were several feet away, licking through the wreckage of the speeder that had been carrying her towards her parent's home. Brilliant, dancing stars exploded before her eyes and she closed her eyes against the pain. Unbidden, her thoughts raced through what had happened. She'd been restrained, but something had struck her forehead. Her hand reached up sluggishly and she wiped the sticky, congealing blood from her face.

Head wound. The thought came unbidden to her clinical mind.

I have to get up, get moving. I can't stay here or we'll die.

The thought of the danger to her unborn twins snapped her into full consciousness, but consciousness brought sharp, shooting pains through her right arm. She tested it, gingerly, finding it didn't appear to be broken, just sprained. Badly. She gritted her teeth, fighting back the waves of agony that raced through her body as she undid the crash webbing that had in all likely hood saved her life. Once free, she fell forward, onto the back of the pilot's chair, twisting to avoid falling on her stomach. Pushing herself up, she could feel the heat of the flames growing strong by the minute.

The pilot.

The need to get out was strong, but Padmé's attention was caught by the seat she'd landed against. She inched forward, peering around the corner and set her jaw against the grisly scene. The pilot was dead, the steering column having punctured his chest cavity. His death would have been instant.

Smoke swirled around her, and she coughed, trying to filter it by covering her face with her sleeve. A noise to her left and above brought her head up. The sound of tearing metal, a shriek that set her teeth on edge, rang through the smoke filled wreckage. And then, amazingly, two blue lightsaber blades sliced into the wreckage, neither blade long enough to reach her, but worked quickly and precisely.

Coughing, she tried to call out.

"Anakin!"

Her voice sounded weak to her own ears.

"Anakin, I'm here!"

The blades finished their almost cut and the section was pulled away. Air rushed in, swirling the smoke around her as Padmé tried to rise to her feet only to find the face that greeted her wasn't the face she was expecting. She shrank back, aware that the flames were licking closer, near the hem of her pants, her options limited.

The face that greeted her was white, almost skeletal in shape, and lacking any human features — except for bright yellow eyes. They stared at her a moment as the smoke thickened and Padmé realized she had no choice. With no desire to die, he was her only way out.

Robotic arms came into view as General Grievous reached in and plucked her from the speeder's wreckage to 'safety'.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13

Padmé's next conscious memory was the taste of bacta in her mouth and the smell of antiseptic.

Consciousness returned slowly, her mind murky from the accident and subsequent shock. Coughing, she could feel none of the after effects of smoke inhalation. She must have been immersed for a long period of time.

But how long?

The thought was fuzzy as her eyes slowly managed to open to take in her surroundings. She lifted her hand to check her face and found it restrained, rising no further than six inches from the mattress. *Grievous!* The last of the cobwebs fled and she sat bolt upright, her eyes wide and searching.

She was in a medical bay, a bay that was equipped with state of the art technology and medical droids. Looking down at herself self-consciously, Padmé was relieved to see she was fully clothed in a medical gown for recovering bacta patients. The gown didn't bulge, nor did it show her condition and the cuffs around her wrists and ankles were padded with fur to keep from being abrasive, but still restricting. Even as she took in her situation, her attention was drawn to the door as she spied her guard before anything else.

A trade federation droid, mark one.

Not very intelligent but would do as instructed no matter the circumstance. Her lips thinned into a firm line. She remembered them well from her time as Naboo's monarch. Shifting in her bunk, she took stock of her situation. Padmé had been well cared for, healed and placed in a private recovery room. Wherever she happened to be, her captors — for she was a captive and the restraints made that clear — wanted her alive and undamaged.

Why?

The droid sentry posted just inside the room took note at that moment that she was awake. It disappeared into the doorway, its metallic voice speaking to one she couldn't make out. The droid returned momentarily, resuming its sentry stance.

Padmé sucked in a sharp breath as General Grievous himself entered the room. Anakin and Obi-Wan were busy searching star systems for the General and here he was in front of her. He moved to the end of the bed and bowed.

Bowed?

What was going on?

Grievous spoke, the hissing sound belying his human lungs and their mechanical aids. "Doctor Naberrie. We are so pleased you could join us."

Padmé stared at him. “You’re Grievous.”

“I’m flattered you’ve heard of me, knowing the company you keep.”

Padmé would have crossed her arms over her chest if her restraints had allowed for it. She settled for clenching her fists, her expression closed. “I think you’d be more surprised if I hadn’t. Being the Chief Medical officer for the Jedi Temple, I’m privy to a lot of their military actions. I need to know where to send aid.”

“Excellent.” Grievous’ tone was pleased. “Locating Kenobi and Skywalker should be an easy task for you.”

“I won’t help you.”

“My master,” he drew the word out so it sounded ominous, “believes otherwise.” Grievous moved to the side and a walking half-droid, projecting the image of a cloaked figure, moved in.

Padmé tilted her chin stubbornly as she stared at the ominous figure. She’d dealt with too much to be intimidated by an *image*. “Is it you I have to thank for my recovery?”

The sinister voice that flowed from the lowered cowl, however, sent shivers down her spine. “You are useless to me dead, Doctor.”

She tried not to appear shaken. “I am a member of the Medical Syndicate and not subject to unlawful confinement. My position grants me immunity.”

A low, dark laughter emerged from the figure. “Your *position* would indicate otherwise. When your purpose has been served, you will be free to go.”

Padmé’s stomach dropped at the wealth of meaning in those words that she didn’t understand. “My purpose?”

The image moved closer, towering over the side of the bed. She couldn’t see the figure’s face but she had the distinct impression she knew him. How was that possible? No one she knew had this kind of malevolent streak.

“You will make excellent bait.”

Understanding was swift after Grievous’ comment about Anakin and Obi-Wan. She sucked in a sharp breath. “You’re after Obi-Wan and Anakin!”

The General laughed as the image moved again but she was given the impression that the dark figure never moved his attention from her. It didn’t speak as she stared at it, *willing* it too, but remained mute.

“Why?”

The image still didn’t respond, simply continued from the room on its motorized legs.

Padmé struggled against her bonds. “Damn you, *why*?”

“You will be freed when they arrive, Doctor.” The General spoke from his position, his laughter almost maniacal. “What are two Jedi to you?”

She almost told him, almost blurted the truth right in that moment; almost told him that her life meant nothing without Anakin. But she didn't. Years of practice had her holding her tongue on the angry retort. Her mind worked furiously as she considered the implications. If they killed Anakin and Obi-Wan, the most public team the Jedi had for good "Public Relations" would vanish. Something told her this was more than just a PR stunt.

Instead she answered the General's question calmly, an edge to her words. "They're my *friends*. I won't help you hurt them!"

Grievous laughed again. "It is not your choice, Doctor."

Padmé watched helplessly as Grievous departed, struggling against the restraints for a few moments before falling back exhausted. She closed her eyes, her mind working in overdrive.

Why Anakin and Obi-Wan specifically? Other than being the Jedi's strongest team, they were average Jedi. She remembered Grievous' lightsabers. Anakin had mentioned the General took them as trophies from the Jedi he'd killed. Was that it? They wanted to destroy the meddlers who were interfering with their plans? Why not just hire assassins like any other good corporation? There were those who hunted Jedi specifically. Jango Fett, in particular, made no secret of the fact that he deliberately targeted Jedi.

Especially after the Geonosian battle several years ago.

Padmé felt an ache in her heart. She remembered the carnage from the arena, the desolation. The image of Anakin's half-smile was burned into her brain. He'd been reassuring her even then, even before she admitted to her feelings for him.

Anakin.

She bowed her head, feeling the exhaustion returning.

Anakin would be frantic when he heard of the accident and not just for her. Padmé closed her eyes, squeezing them tightly shut, hoping this was a bad dream, but knowing in her heart it wasn't; she'd been taken captive by the very creature Anakin and Obi-Wan were sworn to destroy. They'd come looking for him, and find her, an unknown element to their careful plans.

Could they still overcome? Could they still rescue her without sacrificing themselves in the process?

She believed so with all her heart because she had to.

Chapter 14

Chapter 14

Padmé took note of her surroundings over the next few days.

She was moved from the medical ward to a small, private room with its own 'fresher and bed. There amenities were bare, but it was secluded and no one bothered her. As far as prisons went, it could have been a lot worse. Her door, no longer an open doorway, was guarded on the outside by mark 1 droid federation assault droids with orders to keep her from leaving the room.

Over the last day, Padmé noted that her captors treated her with an almost reverent attitude, as if they were holding her only because of their Master's command and not out of any desire to do her harm. She'd been given a thorough medical examination in the areas she'd been wounded, but much to her relief, had stopped short of checking her complete physical.

Apprehensive and on edge, she didn't know who might have seen her hanging suspended in her skivvies while in the bacta. Had the cloaked figure come to visit? She shuddered with the thought. Pacing restlessly, she moved through the small space allocated to her with large strides that took her from one end to the other. Fifteen steps lengthwise and about seven width wise made her prison relatively small.

She was grateful for one thing, though she doubted her captors realized it at the time they'd chosen to put her here. Her room showed all the signs of a hastily constructed cell, including the one wall that was a view port. They'd had little time to cover it so she guessed her capture had been completely unexpected. But, for that little measure of sanity, she would have gone stir crazy by now.

As it was, pacing back and forth as the days progressed, eating what was brought to her — which she admitted was far richer than she normally ate — and worrying about Anakin was starting to drive her to distraction. Was that their plan? Get her so wound up she spilled some information on their whereabouts?

She laughed harshly, the sound distorted by her room. Rubbing her hand absently over her belly, she stared out into space as the star lines of hyperspace continued to flash by. They were in for a nasty surprise if they thought there was something she could tell them. She didn't know where Anakin and Obi-Wan were, though she hoped they were far enough away they couldn't feel her turmoil. She sighed, leaning her forehead against the durasteel viewport, the coldness of space having transferred to the metal, leaving it very cool to the touch. It soothed her forehead.

Anakin.

Closing her eyes, she could picture him there with her, his hands around her waist, his head resting on her shoulder. She could see his eyes, those vivid blues she loved so much, soft

with love for both her and their children. If she tried hard enough, she could almost *see* his determination, hear his ardent promise.

He *would* find her.

It was more than two weeks before Padmé saw another human being.

Fed and catered to by droids, she was constantly monitored and left to her own devices. She requested, and was given access to, a datapad for writing a daily log. Daringly, she asked for more. Warmer clothing — her quarters were chilly. They provided two extra blankets and a loose long pant and sweater set. Her meals were initially accompanied by caf — she'd made a protest at the outset — and now came with water or tea. Lately they'd begun arriving with juice and fruits, a treat for any prisoner

Padmé suspected they knew of her condition, but it wasn't mentioned and she saw neither Grievous nor the malevolent shadow for the next few weeks. The droids, by nature, answered only the questions they were programmed to answer. Or, contrarily, asked what she wanted them to ask. She wasn't given permission to leave her quarters and took to doing sit ups and other assorted exercises to keep her spirits up.

Through it all, her concern grew about the twins.

Her belly was swelling to the point where she would be hard pressed to hide her condition. She saw the changes, sometimes nightly, critiquing herself in the small mirror provided in her 'fresher. Stretch marks had formed on her abdomen where the skin was continuously being pushed and pulled to accommodate the ever increasing size of the babies. She'd received no news and no updates for the General's Master's plan to lure Anakin and Obi-Wan using her as bait. As a consequence she was constantly on edge and fighting to relax.

Continual stresses weren't good for the twins.

When Padmé's door opened on the final morning of week three of her captivity, she didn't even glance up. The droids were punctual with her morning meal and she barely acknowledged them anymore with more than a nod. Her favorite position was against the viewport, wrapped in one of the two comfortable blankets. Ignoring the presence standing in her doorway, Padmé continued to stare into the night sky beyond. They'd dropped from hyperspace the day before and were orbiting a world she didn't recognize.

"Are they treating you well, my dear?"

Padmé's head whipped around in surprise. "Chancellor?"

Or, more correctly, Palpatine's image. It smiled, but she could see the worry lines around his mouth and the strain on his face. His transmission, or at least the head and shoulders of his transmission, was floating above a half-droid similar to the one that she'd seen the first day she'd regained consciousness. "Are you well, Doctor?"

Padmé tucked the blanket more tightly about her shoulders, grateful she wasn't without it, and wondering where this sudden transmission had come from. "As well as one can be as a captive, your Excellency. They've not harmed me."

The relief was clear on his face immediately. “Thank heavens. The Jedi council had launched a massive search effort for you at Master Windu’s directive. They were not promising vengeance — at least most are not — but they were speaking of a heavy punishment for the culprit.”

Padmé smiled, buoyed by the image, and not really caring how it had come to be transmitted into her cell. “That would be Jedi Skywalker, I presume.”

“He’s very attached to you. Some are saying too attached.” Palpatine’s look was pointed, but held no fire. “I simply can’t understand what’s taken the young man so long.”

Padmé laughed despite her situation. “Chancellor, I doubt you’ve been permitted to speak with me to discuss Anakin’s feelings or lack thereof, for me.”

“True.” Palpatine’s visage became somber once more. “I was contacted by General Grievous with the demands for your release. Since your disappearance over a month—”

“Month!” Padmé sat bolt upright, shocked. “It hasn’t been a month yet!”

Palpatine’s expression became sympathetic. “I understand you were hurt somewhat badly, my dear; I’m told you were in bacta for over a week.”

Padmé sank back against the viewport, her brain mentally adding that calculation into her pregnancy. That put her a week shy of six months. Six months. She felt the blood draining from her face. If her captors knew about the twins and who their father was, or even if they *suspected* his identity, and could keep her here until she gave birth...

A chill swept through her and she tightened her grip on the blanket.

“Are you alright, my dear?”

Padmé brought her thoughts back to the present. “I’m fine Chancellor; it’s just been longer than I’d thought.”

“I understand.” He told her emphatically. “But ever since your disappearance the Jedi have been searching for you. They were contacted by your parents when you didn’t arrive on the day you were supposed to. As you can no doubt imagine, they were quite upset when they were told that you had not only been escorted to Naboo without incident but landed safely.”

Padmé imagined her parent’s faces and her heart ached. They would be almost as worried as Anakin and she hadn’t spared them a second thought. “I can imagine, your Excellency. Do you know the terms for my release?”

“Anakin and Obi-Wan are to surrender themselves to Grievous on Korriban in two days’ time.”

“No!”

“I’m afraid so, Doctor. The message also noted that two lives for three was a more than fair trade. However, we’ve received no other ransom demands and are unaware of anyone else who has been taken captive. Are there others of your status with you? Do you know of who they reference?”

Padmé’s throat had closed and she knew her color had drained away.

They knew.

Not only did her captors know, but they'd sent a ransom demand with it to the very people she was trying to hide it from. She couldn't make her voice work, a squeak emerging when she attempted to speak. "I..." Dizziness assailed her, the world spinning, starting to blacken around the edged, and the Chancellor's image starting to waver before her gaze.

The Chancellor's look became alarmed. "Doctor?"

Padmé managed a small, apologetic smile before her eyes rolled back and she slumped, unconscious, against the view port.

"She will recover, my lord."

Padmé felt consciousness returning slowly, the reality of the situation being brought forward abruptly as Grievous' hissing words penetrated her subconscious. The malevolent voice was back, and she heard it speaking, but didn't understand the words. Couldn't comprehend them in the face of the news the Chancellor had brought. Someone else had exposed her secret.

The malevolent voice that had taken to haunting her dreams spoke again, this time the words penetrating her brain. "Her and her children are no use to me dead."

Padmé did her best to continue to feign unconsciousness. She could hear the sound of the monitors they'd hooked up, the whirring of repulsors from the droids moving around her conducted their checks.

Grievous spoke again, reiterating his assurances. "She is unharmed; a simple fainting spell."

"I have much to lose if you are wrong."

"The scan was conclusive; she *is* carrying twins. Jedi Twins, if the midicholrian count is correct."

Padmé somehow managed to keep still, slitting her eyes as she tried to see what was happening and who was behind that awful, chilling voice. Grievous stood with his back to her, blocking her view, and she waited, biding her time, as the General confirmed what she already knew. She was carrying twins and both were in good health despite the strain she'd been under.

The voice spoke again. "I want Skywalker alive, General. Kill Kenobi, but bring me Skywalker."

Anakin! Her breath caught, and she felt herself tensing. The man didn't want her, he was after her husband!

"Skywalker will be difficult to capture."

Grievous shifted and Padmé's heart stopped. She didn't hear what the voice said because that voice belonged to a very familiar face. One that she knew almost as well as her own

name; one she had helped bring to power. Standing before Grievous, his hood thrown back, his face twisted in a malevolent mask, was the image of Chancellor Palpatine.

Chapter 15

Chapter 15

Padmé's eyes flew wide as her brain processed the sensory information, her mouth opening before she thought about the wisdom of it. "*You! You're behind this?*"

Grievous whirled, blocking her view as the image winked out, but the damage had been done and Padmé had seen something she wasn't supposed to see. Padmé's eyes blazed with righteous fire as she glared at Grievous. "You're *his* pawn? I should have figured you wouldn't have the brains to put something like this together yourself!"

Grievous took two steps forward, his metallic arms reaching out to grasp her shoulders and pin her to the bed. Padmé was pushed back into the fabric far enough that she could feel the metal frame biting into the muscles of her back. Her shoulders were held in a bruising grip, metallic fingers digging into her flesh through her shirt. But her ire didn't fade as Grievous' face came close, so close she could smell the rotting, fetid smell of his badly preserved flesh he attempted to hide.

"Careful, *Doctor*. You're useful as a hostage only as long as he says you are."

She tossed her head, her anger and hurt at the discovery making her far more reckless than she'd have been otherwise. "You're a lackey, a *nobody*. You can't harm me unless *he* says otherwise. Let. Me. Go."

Grievous' eyes narrowed dangerously.

Padmé glared back at him.

In reality, her mind was reeling with the revelation, her sense of betrayal acute and demoralizing. Not that it contained her anger. She was angry at herself for not seeing through the schemes of the Chancellor, for having fallen into his trap so easily — for having been the one to have helped bring him to power. She was angry with herself for allowing her guard to drop and be taken in by sweet words of concern that had sounded so genuine. Her voice dropped to a soft, dangerous level. "Let. Me. *Go!*"

Grievous' hands flexed, piercing her skin and drawing blood, but she didn't flinch, her expression simply becoming grimmer. His hold finally relaxed and his hands drew away. His face remained close and his yellow, sickly eyes stared at her from far too close. "You are safe only so long as *he* wishes, Doctor."

"I'll take my chances."

"And that of your children?" Grievous' tone was deliberately cruel. "I think not, Doctor. Angering me will get you nowhere."

"It makes me feel better." She spat the words. "How long have you been working for him, Grievous? Ten years? Twelve? And here we all thought you were the real threat when you're nothing more than the second in command of a sinking ship!"

Grievous laughed, the diabolical sounds giving her the shivers. “Think what you will, Doctor. The Chancellor holds the power, the Jedi are stretched thin and more are dying by the day. Soon, my Master will have Jedi Skywalker and we will be unstoppable.”

“Anakin will never join you!”

Breaking down into a coughing fit as he chuckled again, his eyes gleamed knowingly. “We shall see.”

Padmé watched helplessly as Grievous departed, her anger sinking into a cold knot in the pit of her stomach. *Anakin!* She fought against the bonds on her wrists and ankles, trying to free herself. She had to warn him. Several minutes of struggling passed before she conceded defeat. Her shackles were too tight, and despite their fur covered insides, she was wearing a raw line along her wrists and ankles.

“It is unfortunate you saw that, my dear.”

Padmé’s head came up, her eyes narrowing at the sad, cultured tones of the image in front of her. “Unfortunate that I know the truth? That I know you’ve orchestrated this whole thing?”

“You’ve never had much use for Politics, Doctor, why start now?”

Glaring at the image, Padmé couldn’t help but feel as if she’d been betrayed by her best friend. She’d always thought the Chancellor had considered her best interests before offering suggestions. Now she knew he’d been trying to influence her decisions. There couldn’t be any other explanation for his carefully timed help. “I’m not interested in politics, Chancellor, only the welfare of my friends. Know what? You’ve betrayed the republic by holding its highest office and turning against it and I don’t care.”

“Of course you don’t.” He nodded knowingly, his kindly face a mask of empathy and understanding. “Nothing is as important to you as your career. Of course, I believe I may have been hasty in thinking you didn’t want children, my dear. I am curious; who’s their father?”

Padmé stared at his open face with revulsion. “Go to Hell.”

“Shall I guess?” The image moved closer, his eyes narrowing dangerously, though his voice remained that of the pleasant, grandfatherly figure she’d come to think of him as. ‘Is it Kenobi or Skywalker?’ Padmé blinked. Kenobi? She almost laughed at the thought, but didn’t have the chance to recover as the Chancellor continued his speculations. “You care for them both. They’ve played an instrumental role in where you are today, but I believe Jedi Kenobi is too much of a Jedi to fall for your considerable charms. Skywalker then. Yes, young Anakin. A very passionate fellow, isn’t it?”

Carefully keeping her face blank, she barely kept the blush from her face, even though it was already suffused with anger.

Chancellor Palpatine folded his hands together in front of him, the blue image holding a contemplative expression. “He must be passionate indeed. Twins; Jedi twins at that. I knew the boy had potential, and of his interest in you beyond the professional, but I doubted his ability to capitalize on the opportunity. I must say, I’m delighted to be wrong.”

Padmé felt the words cut like a knife. Stung, she opened her mouth to reply before snapping it shut again.

The Chancellor's face turned into a mask of malevolent intention. "Nothing to say to your old friend, my dear?"

"You are *not* my friend." Padmé was stung into replying. "And Anakin will never join you, you monster!"

"Come now, there's no need for name calling. You've been treated well in your time with us."

"I've been denied my rights and freedoms, cut off from all outside contact, stripped of my dignity and am to be ransomed! You've violated my privacy, Chancellor, that's hardly being treated well."

"Your privacy?" He looked almost wounded, his Chancellor's voice holding a note of concern. "Whatever do you mean?"

Padmé snapped her mouth shut; she'd said enough. She settled for glowering at him and then turning her head away to look out across the medical bay.

"No matter. You will be free and unharmed soon enough, Doctor. Just think of this as another Doctor/Patient encounter." Palpatine's image was carried away, his last words echoing about the bay ominously.

Closing her eyes, the ache steeling in her chest was a tangible symbol of her despair. One of the twins moved and she reached to rub her belly, to offer soothing assurance, only to have her hands stopped just shy. She shifted on the bed, leaving her one hand stretched out at an awkward angle as she maneuvered to allow her hand to rest on her stomach.

The kick of a little leg was enough to bring tears, but tears that were quickly blinked back.

They wouldn't get the gratification of being show weakness. Padmé refused to be a pawn, a piece to be bartered with. Somehow, someday, she would find a way out and get a message to Anakin. She just didn't know how yet.

Chapter 16

Author's Note: My apologies for the lack of updates the last few days, but life has a way of jumping on one at the most inopportune times.

Chapter 16

Padmé was brought to the shuttle they would use to descend to Korriban's surface in stun cuffs and shackles, flanked by two guards. They'd provided her with baggy clothing, but her condition was pronounced and she carefully cradled her swollen abdomen as she was assisted, not discourteously, into the shuttle but Grievous' bodyguards. It was an odd thing to be escorted by guards who weren't playing rough. But then, she suspected she wouldn't be leaving the shuttle; she was simply along to ensure Anakin's good behavior.

She'd had several ideas over the last two days, but none of the opportunity to do anything with them. Reluctantly, she settled on the only plausible solution. They would keep her from sending any kind of message, but Anakin would insist to talk to her personally before even considering surrender. She knew it with every fiber of her being. He would never surrender if he found out she'd been mistreated. Grievous, she suspected, knew that too. There was little, though, the droid general would be able to do to prevent her from passing along her message.

Anakin and the rest of the Jedi needed to be warned as to the Chancellor's part in the galactic civil war.

Padmé was settled in a comfortably padded seat and then bolted in place hand and foot and carefully covered in crash webbing. Noting the droids were extra careful about protecting her belly, her heart sank. Each passing day had brought a chilling conclusion. She was alive only so long as it took for the twins to be born. Then she would be of little use and killing her would be in Grievous' power. But not until then. Of course, it also meant that this exchange was a ruse. A trap, and one Anakin and Obi-Wan would walk into blindly.

Fortunately, she'd shown no signs of labor yet, not even the false contractions she'd been expecting for the past week, and was in relatively high spirits — considering her circumstances.

The thrusters on the shuttle powered up, a dull roar in the passenger compartment, and she was pushed gently back in her chair, despite the inertial compensators, as the shuttle lifted from its docking platform.

Grievous stood, unmoving, his yellow eyes watching her. Through the whole of the trip, Padmé did her best to ignore him. Keeping her eyes on her knees and her thoughts on ensuring the flutter in her belly subsided, she focused on her breathing. She didn't need to be sick; it might ruin everything.

The time passed before she was ready and Padmé was pushed back in her chair once more as the shuttle maneuvered in for landing.

There was no viewport, no outside reference and didn't know where they were exactly other than on Korriban. She hoped Anakin and Obi-Wan would be able to find them. If nothing else, if she didn't walk away from this, she had to get her message through.

The whine of the engines wound down, and Padmé felt gravity take over as the hatch was opened and the hiss of air pressure escaping made itself known. Flexing her jaw to equalize the pressure in her head, she waited. One of Grievous' bodyguards undid the clasps holding the locking mechanisms in place and urged her to her feet. She went, wrapping her hands around her belly once more, and rubbing gently as it twisted and clenched. The twins were restless.

She was marched down the ramp just behind Grievous and had to resist the childish urge to kick him in the back of his head; he made such a tempting target. Stopped, just out of sight, one of the bodyguards held its Force Pike out to keep her cornered. Grievous continued, coming to a halt at the base and then taking two steps out of sight onto sand the same color as human blood. Her stomach twisted, lurching as the voice that stopped Grievous sent her heart into her throat.

"So this was a trap after all, General. We should have known you didn't have the Doctor and any of her colleagues."

Obi-Wan.

Had he brought Anakin? A part of her hoped not. She knew her husband well — seeing her in chains, the very signs of the slavery he'd left behind, might lead him to do something rash. On the other hand, Anakin was her best chance at getting out of here alive.

Grievous' reply was full of loathing. "I expected better of you, Negotiator. I wouldn't reveal myself without such a valuable hostage."

Padmé saw one of Grievous' arms beckon and she was pushed down the ramp. She stumbled near the end, going down and twisting to land on her shoulder instead of her belly.

"NO!"

Padmé was powerless to do more than turn, shifting to prevent damage to her babies, curling protectively as she hit the rocky ground. The sound of a lightsaber igniting was distant even as Obi-Wan's voice cut through the ringing in her head.

"*Anakin!* Stop this. The Doctor is fine. Aren't you, Doctor?"

Padmé closed her eyes, fighting against the burning feeling in her shoulder. She'd hit pretty hard and, without touching it, self-diagnosed a dislocated shoulder. Her stomach made to rebel as the pain seeped into her consciousness completely. She used it to focus her thoughts and, using her other hand, pushed herself to a semi-sitting position. "I—" she cleared her throat. "I am alright."

"No you're not!" Anakin's tone blazed with fury. "They've hurt you!"

"Anakin!" Padmé put all the strength she could muster into the warning note in her voice. She couldn't see him yet, but having him rush headlong into the fray without being able to deliver her message wasn't going to help anything.

Anakin seemed to ignore her and directed his next comment to Grievous. "I want to see her, to make sure she's alright."

"Of course, General." Grievous waved him forward graciously, the power feed for the stun cuffs in plain view in his hand.

Padmé had succeeded in twisting herself into an awkward sitting position when familiar arms slid around her, settling around her waist and helped her into a more comfortable position. "Are you alright, my love?"

His words were soft and ruffled her hair, but no one would have heard them. She nodded and winced as he brushed against her injured shoulder. "I think I dislocated something in the fall."

He met her gaze, and she could see the intense relief he was feeling at finding her well. "Is that all?"

She nodded, glancing behind him to Grievous. "Anakin, you can't go through with this; they intend to kill me once the twins are born. The Chancellor is behind the whole thing, he's Grievous' master! He—"

Anakin raised his hand, placing a finger against her lips to silence her. "I know."

Her eyes widened. "How-?"

Anakin glanced to where Grievous and Obi-Wan stood, watching them intently. His eyes flashed dangerously. "No time for that now, Padmé. Are you sure it's your shoulder?"

"Can you set it for me?"

"I don't want to hurt you."

"It'll hurt much less once it's set; trust me."

"Are you satisfied, Skywalker?"

Anakin didn't spare Grievous a glance as he placed his hands on her shoulder and arm as she directed. Padmé met his gaze and nodded once. Anakin's hands jerked with sudden strength and there was a popping sound as the bone slid back into its proper position. Padmé clenched her jaw against the pain, closing her eyes as she struggled not to lose what she'd had for lunch.

"Padmé?"

Her eyes opened after a few moments, the pain having subsided into a dull ache. She managed a smile, swallowing the bile in the back of her throat. "I'm fine, Anakin. Don't go through with this, please."

"*Skywalker!*"

"I have to." Anakin's eyes hardened but his touch was gentle as he assisted her to her feet. "For you, for me; for our future and the future of the galaxy. I promise I won't get myself killed."

She squeezed his forearm, blinking back instant tears. "See that you don't."

Anakin squeezed her hand before rounding on Grievous. "I'm satisfied. Release her."

Grievous pressed a button and Padmé's shackles dropped, releasing her hands and legs to the first freedom she'd had in several months. Red bruises where she'd tried to wiggle out of the restrains were visible on the tender skin of her wrists. Anakin, with his head turned away, thankfully didn't notice, and Padmé rubbed them discreetly to try and ease the strength of the marks.

Obi-Wan spoke next. "And the other hostages?"

"I have just released them, Negotiator." Grievous laughed diabolically, the sound marred with his sickly cough. "*All* of them. The Doctor and her unborn children are free to go; with your surrender of course."

Obi-Wan was not a stupid man by anyone's terms, but the plainly spoken truth by Grievous visibly rocked him back on his heels. His started gaze went directly to where Anakin still held Padmé about the shoulders, their closeness and stance, despite the dismay on Padmé's face, undoubtedly as telling as plain words. And he knew he hadn't seen it because he hadn't wanted to. Padmé could see it in his face.

Grievous chose that moment to strike, his bodyguards closing in and wrenching her from Anakin's grasp as the snap-hiss of four lightsabers igniting split the silence, their blue and green blades diving for Obi-Wan's back.

"Padmé!" Anakin lunged for her only to be driven back by the twirling force pikes. His lightsaber snapped on in that moment even as Obi-Wan regained his senses and sprang out of reach of Grievous' attack.

Padmé struggled against the metallic hands that dug into her uninjured upper arm, her eyes glued to the fight in front of her. Lightsabers turned into arcs of light she couldn't follow as Grievous attacked Obi-Wan. Anakin's blue eyes blazed with fury and worry, his lightsaber working up and down, heavy sweeps breaking the rhythm of the bodyguard's spinning force pike. Anakin dispatched the first of four guards surrounding her, his lightsaber sweeping in to sever arm, legs and then sweep down the center of the torso. The droid's body twitched before falling into a heap of components.

"Padmé!"

"Anakin!" Gripping the grand that held her, she attempted to pry the metallic fingers off her arm. She was being dragged slowly back up into the ship. "Don't, Anakin! Don't, it's a trap!"

Obi-Wan battled Grievous behind Anakin, his blade a blur of light that appeared as a single, solid blue shield protecting him from the sweeps of Grievous' four blades. One went flying, extinguisher as the hit was severed. A second went flying, this one still clutched in the severed hand of the General. "Focus, Anakin." Obi-Wan's voice was calm despite the exchange of blows between him and Grievous, his tone imperious.

"Anakin!" Desperate, Padmé pleaded with him as she was drawn further away, "Anakin, *please!*"

Anakin didn't appear to hear either of them, advancing by using the Force to power his jump; his lightsaber flashing and cleaving clean through the force pike raised to deflect his

blow. It went straight through the droid, the power attack sending the blade clear through to the ground.

Grievous began to laugh, twirling the blades above his head and coming at Obi-Wan with decisive sweeps, attempting to herd him backwards towards the transport where Padmé was being dragged. Obi-Wan, as if sensing the intention, refused to budge, holding his ground and going on the offensive as he pushed Grievous back.

Anakin disappeared from her view as she was pulled back up the ramp, the sound of clashing lightsaber blades echoing back to her. "Get away Anakin! Run. Save yourself!"

"I won't leave you!" Anakin voice was determined and distorted, his determination coming through clearly.

"Anakin, please; it's your he's after!" The droid holding her arm twisted it painfully and she gasped, crying out.

"Padmé!"

The second droid grasped her other arm to continue dragging her backwards. She couldn't speak as pain shot through her shoulder and into her chest cavity. Her knees buckled, blackness closing in on the edges of her vision.

"Padmé!"

Anakin roared her name, leaping up the ramp with a speed born of desperation and she could see his initial reaction to finding her slumped painfully between the two droids. His eyes flickered, a yellow tint appearing as he reached out. "Let her go!"

The droids did nothing, simply continued to drag her backwards, every move sending jolts of white hot agony through her body.

Anakin's eyes narrowed and his hand, his free hand, came up. Padmé was suddenly released as the droids were wrenched bodily from her to slam into the side of the ship's ramp. She lay crumpled on the ground, trying to catch her breath. Watching with horror as Anakin tossed the droids a second and then a third time against the bulk heads, her eyes burned with tears as her whispered "Anakin!" was lost in the metallic crash.

His eyes blazed righteous fire, never leaving the two droid bodies that hung suspended in mid-air. "You will *not* touch her."

Padmé felt the force of his presence. Unable to tear her gaze away, she watched horrified as the droid bodies seemed to bend inwards, crushed by some invisible hand that was linked to Anakin's. He folded his hand until it was a fist, the metal bodies shrieking in protest as they were forced inward by the extension of his will, crumpling with a shower of sparks and spare parts. They hit the deck and rolled down the ramp, beyond view.

Anakin turned his attention to her. His eyes still blazed with fury, but a fury that was been sated. For now. "Are you alright?"

She nodded mutely, unable to answer him, his display having chilled her to the bone.

Anakin took the several steps to her side and knelt, gathering her gently in his arms. The fury died to be replaced with concern. Padmé settled against him, resting her head against his

chest as he lifted her in his arms. Her shoulder throbbed abysmally, but the feel of his arms around her, his scent teasing her nostrils — despite his display of power — awakened the same emotions they always did. This was Anakin; her Anakin. She curled closer and he cradled her, placing a kiss on the top of her head as he moved back down the ramp.

Padmé's gaze was drawn to where Grievous and Obi-Wan still battled, each with a single lightsaber. She tightened her grip on Anakin, feeling his body tense. He wanted to jump in, to go help his mentor, but was torn with his responsibilities to her. Padmé clung to him as she took stock of the battle field.

Grievous was the only enemy left.

Reluctantly, she loosened her hold. "Does Obi-Wan need your help?"

Anakin glanced down at her, his eyes once again holding the soft, clear color of the Nabooian skies, as if the incident on the shuttle had never happened. "He can take care of himself. I need to get you to our transport."

Padmé didn't object as he carried her away, turning to block the view of Obi-Wan fighting Grievous.

But nothing could disguise the death scream of the Droid General and Anakin's arms convulsed around her as he strode towards the transport. She closed her eyes, trying to block out the sound. But it wasn't the sound of Grievous' death scream that haunted her as Anakin boarded the transport he and Obi-Wan had used to get to Korriban.

It was the shriek of twisting metal bending at angles it wasn't supposed to that echoed in the back of her mind.

Chapter 17

Author's Note: Four days on the road which followed a crazy hectic week — hopefully life settles ;) Enjoy!

Chapter 17

“Twins, Doctor?”

Padmé flinched at Obi-Wan’s mild question as he turned the co-pilot’s chair around to look at her. She slid her hand defensively to her abdomen. “Yes, Master Kenobi.”

“Back off, Master; she’s had a rough enough day.”

Obi-Wan spared Anakin little more than a look. “As a part of this exchange, I deserve to know, Anakin.”

Anakin cast a hooded look at Padmé. She bit her lip, looking pointedly from him to Obi-Wan and drawing an intrigued look from the Jedi Master.

“Does that indicate Anakin has something to tell me?”

Anakin winced as Obi-Wan turned his attention from Padmé to him. “A thing or two.”

Obi-Wan crossed his arms over his chest, leaning back in his chair and waited expectantly. Padmé watched him, her heart sinking as she wondered what his reaction to Anakin’s honesty would be. Would he be angry? Disappointed? Reproachful?

Anakin spoke, his eyes locking with hers as if drawing strength from such a simple contact. “Padmé is my wife.”

“I see.” Obi-Wan stroked his beard and Padmé knew instantly that he hadn’t been expecting *that* particular honesty. He divided his attention between husband and wife equally, examining them carefully as if they were some unknown specimen. “I trust that the twins are yours as well.”

“They could be no one else’, Master Kenobi.” Stung by his comment, she felt obliged to reply.

“This causes complications, Doctor. As I’m sure you are aware.”

“I know.” She dropped her gaze, unable to deal with the disproving light in his eyes. Obi-Wan, as Anakin’s best friend, should have understood. Or so she’d hoped.

“Anakin.”

Anakin had turned his back on his friend and was adjusting their course. “Yes?”

“May I speak with you — *privately*?”

Anakin jerked; Padmé saw the reaction from the corner of her eye. It looked as if Obi-Wan and poked him with an invisible stick. “Will you be alright in here, Padmé?”

She nodded, offering him a weak smile as he unbuckled his crash webbing; Obi-Wan was already on his feet and waiting in the doorway leading from the cockpit. With one final course correction, Anakin made to move towards his friend only to stop beside her. Padmé looked up at him questioningly.

Anakin’s hand slid into her hair, cupping the back of her head and sending a thrill of excitement, despite their audience, down her spine. He kissed her. Softly. Lingeringly. His lips offered the reassurance no words ever could. When he pulled back with a smile, his gaze was tender. It banished the darkness she’d seen in him before, putting the fears of what she’d seen in the shuttle on Korriban to even further to rest. It had to have been the moment; nothing more.

“I’ll be right back.”

She nodded again, mutely, watching him leave and noting the disapproving frown on Obi-Wan’s face. The door slid shut behind them and she let out a breath, leaning back in her chair. A smile she couldn’t help tugged at her lips. Same Anakin.

Left alone for several minutes, Padmé took the opportunity to make herself more comfortable, unbuckling her crash webbing and firmly telling herself she wasn’t going to eavesdrop on a conversation Obi-Wan didn’t want her to hear. She checked their coordinates and their course, certain that Anakin had plotted it properly, but needing something to do. Finally, straightening, she placed her hands in the small of her aching back and stretched, her eyes going to the cockpit door.

What were they talking about?

She looked away. *I will not eavesdrop*, she told herself firmly. It was rude to listen to a conversation that Obi-Wan obviously didn’t want her to hear. Biting her lip, she worried it between her teeth as her feet moved, with an apparent mind of their own, towards the door. Hearing muffled voices on the other side, she stopped. One little listen couldn’t hurt, right? Didn’t she deserved to know since they were likely talking about *her*? Hesitantly, carefully, knowing she shouldn’t but unable to help herself, she placed her ear to the door.

“.. *can’t know that!*” The anger in Anakin’s voice as he responded to something Obi-Wan had said came through clearly. “*She’s not a Jedi and the Council can’t make her do anything!*”

“*You are their father and you are a Jedi, Anakin. Even if they let her keep the children, you would be permanently assigned elsewhere.*”

“*They can’t do that.*”

“*They can.*”

“*But... what about Master Ki-Adi-Mundi? He’s married; he’s got six wives for Force sake!*”

“*It’s a part of his cultural requirements, Anakin. Males of status marry more than once and father many offspring. He doesn’t see them, however.*”

Padmé could hear boot heels striking the deck as one of them paced. Despite the seriousness of their conversation, a ghost of a smile crossed her face. That would have been Anakin. She could almost see him in her mind's eye. His arms would be swinging, his stride long and purposeful, his heels striking firmly since he couldn't — wouldn't — strike his friend.

"It's not fair. I love her, Obi-Wan."

"Attachment is forbidden, Anakin."

"I don't care!"

Care Anakin, she urged him silently, her heart flopping in her chest. *It could be the end of your career as a Jedi.*

"You should, Anakin." Obi-Wan's tone was stern, but not unforgiving. Compassionate yet firm. *"They may let you stay and simply place the children in the crèche."*

Padmé drew back from the door, sucking in a sharp breath. The crèche. *No!* Her arms wrapped protectively about her abdomen as she stumbled backward to sink into the nearest chair. She closed her eyes against the thought. The Jedi would take her babies and place them in the one place, the *last* place, she wanted them to be.

One of the twins took that moment to kick, as if reassuring her in the only way they knew how. Padmé rubbed her belly, feeling their movements, drawing assurance and peace from the sensation. The twins were still with her for now, cocooned in the safety of her womb. Was it enough? Would carrying them to term — or as long as she did — be enough? Could she honestly continue working in the temple, around the Jedi and visiting the crèche knowing these were her children and she wasn't allowed to claim them as hers?

The sound of the door opening brought her eyes open and Obi-Wan stepped back in. He looked at her grimly. "Anakin insists the decision is yours, Doctor."

"Decision?"

Obi-Wan didn't spare his young friend a glance as his body physically blocked Anakin from reentering the cockpit. "The council has asked to see you, to ascertain your good health and has requested we escort you back personally. Anakin believes you may not wish to return."

Padmé felt her heart stick in her throat. Anakin knew her too well; a part of her *wanted* to turn and flee. Flee from the threat the council posed to her children. But she couldn't; they weren't just hers. They were Anakin's too and he deserved to have a say as much as she did.

"Anakin?"

With obvious reluctance, Obi-Wan moved back to the co-pilot's chair, allowing Anakin access. Anakin didn't move back to the pilot's chair but instead sank down on one knee next to her chair and covered her hands where they rested against her belly. Obi-Wan was pointedly looking at the consoles, visibly uncomfortable with the display.

Padmé searched Anakin's gaze. "What do you think?"

Anakin cast a dark look behind her towards Obi-Wan, but his gaze when it returned to hers was tender. His thumbs gently rubbed the back of her hands. "I think it's out of my hands. We can't keep this a secret now, Padmé. The Council will have to be told if we return."

"You'll be cast out—"

He was shaking his head, his smile gentle. "We don't know that for sure. There are members of the council who have wives or husbands. I'm *hoping* I can convince them you're my strength and not my weakness."

Padmé freed one hand to run her fingers through the curls clinging to the side of his face. "I'm both, aren't I?"

Desire sparked to life in his gaze and she saw the answer before he nodded, his sexy half-smile appearing. "In more ways than one. The choice is yours, Padmé. We can return to Coruscant and the Council to face judgment."

"Or?"

Anakin's smile faded. "We have a couple of choices. Obi-Wan has agreed to take you to Naboo to be with your parents — or Tatooine to be with my mother."

"You wouldn't be coming?"

"I wouldn't dare." His smile died and his eyes became hooded, guarded. "The Council would track you and try to take the twins."

And it was as simple as that. She could give up Anakin and live with her babies, raise them as her mother had, or she could surrender her children to the temple, still see them, and possibly keep Anakin. There were no certainties. "Not exactly the choices I was hoping for."

Anakin smiled faintly. "With the Chancellor behind the attack on you, and the war, it might simply be safer to go into hiding."

"Not without you." She clutched his hands, squeezing, hoping she'd get her point across. After months agonizing over having him gone, of not knowing if he was alive or dead; after months of loneliness that had only been amplified by her condition, how could she let him go?

"I—" Anakin stopped and took a deep breath. "I want to go with you, Padmé, more than anything."

"Then why don't you?"

"I have to end this; I have to help them stop the Chancellor."

He'd rendered her speechless, her heart suddenly hammering fearfully in her chest. He wanted to help stop the Chancellor, the very man who was searching for him, who desired his capture. She shook her head mutely, her eyes wide, hoping he could read the silent message in them.

He did, but he misinterpreted it. He moved forward, collecting her in his arms and stroking her hair. "Don't worry, Padmé, please? We can beat him, I know we can."

"You mustn't go." She managed to choke the words out as she clung to him, squeezing her eyes shut. This was like a bad nightmare. A nightmare she couldn't wake up from.

"I have to."

"Why? It's you he wants; you're the reason he captured me!"

"That's why." His arms tightened. "The Chancellor is a powerful man to have hidden in plain sight; none of the other Jedi are strong enough to deal with him."

"Maybe if they went as a team—"

"Shhh." Anakin rocked her gently, as if she were a small child. "I have to do this, my love. If not for the Jedi, then for you and for our family. Our children will never be safe so long as the Chancellor lives."

She buried her face in his shoulder; not believing what she was hearing but knowing with every fiber of her being that he was right. The Chancellor, whatever his part in this, knew about her children and had guessed their father regardless of confirmation from her. If he couldn't have Anakin, it was entirely possible he'd come after them. That he'd try and steal away one, if not both, of the twins. It was as confusing as it was painful; Anakin was speaking of killing a man they both had considered a close, personal friend.

Anakin lifted her in his arms, holding her close to his chest, and move from the cockpit and Obi-Wan's disapproving presence into the habitation section of the shuttle. He brought her straight to the main bunk room and gently deposited her on the bed, joining her. Padmé felt the tension release as she was placed on the mattress and the tears began to slide down her cheeks.

Her fears and hopes spilled out in wet, silent waves on Anakin's shoulder. He held her. Gently, tenderly, his hands stroking her in a comforting fashion. He said nothing and for that she was grateful. She needed time to think about the options before her, to evaluate her choices and see if there were any they'd missed. But she knew she didn't have it. If they were going to change course they'd need to do it soon.

Anakin's arms around her were a soothing and comforting barrier against the evil men who would hurt her and their babies. A barrier against despair and desolation; they were her life line to sanity. Here, inside his embrace, she could relax and let the carefully built walls of control crumble. So it was no surprise when her eyes began to feel heavy and the effects of the last stressing month began to take its toll.

She felt Anakin stretch her out and join her, allowing her to use his arm as a pillow, and despite knowing she had a decision to make, she didn't fight the exhaustion. The decision would have to wait.

"Coruscant."

Obi-Wan turned about from his seat in the pilot's chair, mildly surprised. "Pardon?"

Padmé smiled faintly. She had no great love for Obi-Wan's attitude, but she was grateful he'd kept her husband out of so many difficult scrapes. "We'll return to the council. We have

a lot of explaining to do.”

Obi-Wan looked to Anakin, who had taken up a stance behind his wife, his hands resting loosely on her hips. Anakin nodded; she felt it against her hair. “Padmé’s right, Obi-Wan. The Council deserves our report and there were things Padmé saw and heard they need to know about.”

“You’re certain? Once I input the coordinates there will be no turning back.”

Her nod was decisive. “There was no turning back the moment I found out about my pregnancy, Obi-Wan. Take us home.”

Obi-Wan voiced no further arguments as he punched in the coordinates and sent them hurdling through hyperspace.

Chapter 18

Author's Note: So I meant to have this completely posted by the end of this month and life decided to throw me a few curve balls. Go figure. I'll try and double up on the posts so there's more to read and less waiting — enjoy :)

Chapter 18

“Anakin?”

“Hmm?”

Padmé propped her head on her hand so she could see his face. His eyes were closed, his expression contented as he lay beside her.

Obi-Wan hadn't objected to them sharing their quarters, but he didn't approve either. Anakin had told her that he didn't care what Obi-Wan thought. She was his wife and she would sleep with him. How else was he to ensure she slept comfortably in the late months of her pregnancy? Teased into submission, she'd capitulated without much of a fight — she felt more comfortable with him nearby anyway.

She placed her hand on his chest, idly tracing a circle with her index finger. “Anakin.”

His eyes fluttered as he turned to look at her, his head rolling on the pillow. “Mmm, yes, Angel?”

A soft smile crossed her lips. She loved seeing him like this; first thing in the morning, softened by dreamless sleep, or pleasant dreams. The mask of power, the confident warrior was gone. In his place was a ruffled, incredibly sexy man who exuded contentment and had hair that fell in his eyes like a little boy. She couldn't resist brushing his bangs out of his eyes. “You look quite content.”

“Shouldn't I be?” He caught her hand, kissing the backs of her fingers. “I have two children on the way and the most beautiful wife — who only grows more beautiful with every passing moment. She's the woman I love and the mother of my children; which makes me the luckiest man in the galaxy.”

Padmé blushed, warmed by his simple, but sweetly sincere, words but she couldn't resist a gentle tease. “Careful, you'll make me jealous.”

He chuckled and rolled onto his side so they were now laying nose-to-nose as he lifted the hand that still held her fingers captive. His knuckles gently brushed the skin of her cheek. “I've never loved anyone more than I love you in this moment, Padmé.”

Searching his gaze, she saw nothing of the tormented emotions she'd seen during the fight with Grievous. She saw nothing of the yellow tint that had scared her so, or the rage that had threatened to engulf the both of them in a storm of fury. None of that was even hinted at.

Instead his eyes were soft, suffused with caring and admiration; he wore his heart on his sleeve and didn't care. Despite that she sought, she was humbled by that look.

Until creases appeared at the edges of his eyes and they twinkled with sudden mischief. "Not to mention one I don't have to hide from my best friend anymore."

So that was it. It explained why he was suddenly uptight, and defensive around Obi-Wan, but relaxed all at the same time. It was as if a great weight had been lifted from his shoulders, banishing the doubts and second thoughts to the darkest recesses of his mind. She laughed softly. "You're a big phony, Anakin Skywalker." Her hand connected with his chest and dropped him to his back with a shove.

Anakin laughed, pulling her with him so she was half-lying across his naked chest. "Anything to get you where I want you, my love." His lips captured hers in an intense kiss and she melted against him, unable to deny herself the heaven of his touch as his other hand slid up her back, his fingers splayed wide as if to hold her in one hand.

Pulling away reluctantly, Padmé dropped a quick, apologetic kiss on his lips as he proceeded to pout the loss of it. "The Hero with No Fear image doesn't match the look on your face, Anakin."

He crossed his eyes comically before grinning at her. "Neither does that one, but I don't care. The media isn't here; just my personal medic."

She cocked an eyebrow at him. "Are you broken?"

"Maybe, Doc." Mischief lit his eyes, making them sparkle. "What do you think? Am I broken; do I need my medic to fix me?"

Padmé stared at him for a half a second, her thoughts whirling back to those awful moments in Grievous' shuttle where Anakin had displayed a powerful, soul-shaking anger that had pulverized her in a way no other action he could ever take would. She pulled away, looking down and watching from the corner of her eye as the playfulness faded from his gaze, concern replacing it.

"Padmé?"

Padmé pushed back and away until she was no longer touching him. He'd given her the perfect opening without realizing it and she wasn't about to lose it. She sat cross legged, watching him seriously as she leaned back against the wall that braced the bunk. It wasn't much distance, but she needed it for the discussion they were about to have. Serious, almost deadly so, she spoke softly. "I think a part of you is broken and you're not aware of it, Anakin."

"What are you talking about?" Bracing himself on his elbows, he frowned at her. "I was just joking."

"I know." She smiled sadly. "But I'm not, Anakin. You frightened me the other day."

He blinked, completely caught off guard, stunned by her admission. "Frightened?"

Padmé nodded, never taking her eyes from his face and unable to miss the hurt which flashed in his blue orbs. "On Korriban. I was frightened when you came after me up the ramp. You were wild; out of control. What you did to those droids..." She shuddered, closing her

eyes at the memory. The sound of shrieking metal echoed again in her mind. The look on his face, the yellowing of his eyes, the pure *rage* at their audacity to deny him what was his, to threaten the one person who meant more to him than life, was imprinted on the inside of her eyelids.

The backs of his fingers gently brushed her cheek, hesitant and unsure. “Padmé?”

Her eyes fluttered open to look at him. His solemn, worried expression looked back at her. “I keep wondering if your actions would have been different if I’d been held by flesh and blood beings, Anakin. I want to say no, that you would have had more restraint,” the fear of it nearly choked her up and Padmé forced herself to continue, “but I can’t. I *can’t*. I saw your face when you came up that ramp. You would have done anything, no matter the personal cost, to free me.”

“I didn’t want them to harm you.”

“I know that.” Her words were whispered, broken. “I don’t want harm to come to you either, Anakin, but that’s what is happening. Can’t you see? Can’t you see that your actions are hurting you more than helping?”

“I saved your life!”

“And risked your own in the process. My life means nothing if you’re not here to share it!”

His lips snapped shut, the muscle along his jaw tightening as he rolled away to sit with his legs hanging off the bed, his bare feet touching the deck. Anakin’s posture was rigid, the muscles along his neck and shoulders tense. His head was cocked and he stared broodily across the small cabin. For a moment, Padmé feared she’d said too much; pushed too far. Anakin, her sweet Anakin, however, reaffirmed her faith by not pulling away.

“What would you have had me do, Padmé? Risk having them hurt your or our children? Swept in lightsaber blazing only to mistake their moves and harm you instead?” He looked back at her, and she could read the turmoil in his gaze. “I couldn’t have lived with myself if I’d hurt you.”

She stayed silent, waiting, somehow knowing he wasn’t finished. The tension in his shoulders had eased somewhat with his admission.

“I was afraid I was going to lose you and that they would take you from me for good; I couldn’t let that happen. I went through hell when word came that you went missing. I came close to being expelled by the council twice only to have Master Windu speak on my behalf. He backed me in many of my proposed missions to find you, and, when I inadvertently stumbled across the Chancellor’s true nature, backed me when I agreed to his demands. He wants to see you safe almost as much as I do. I love you; I’d do *anything* for you.”

“I know.” Tears pooled in her eyes but didn’t fall. “Don’t you see though? I know enough about Jedi from living among them for the last few years of my life, Anakin. Anger, fear, jealousy even obsession are all shades of the darkside. I know what I saw on that ramp and it wasn’t the dream of the little boy I once knew embracing the dream he so desperately sought. It was the nightmare come to—”

“No!”

Padmé fell silent.

“No.” Anakin repeated softer, but she could hear the desperation in his tone. “I couldn’t... I wouldn’t give up all...” He met her gaze again. “I’d never do anything to jeopardize what we have Padmé, *never*.”

“But you did.” Her words were barely a whisper. “Anakin, you used your rage to destroy those droids instead of letting our love be a shield. Why do you distrust me so?”

“I don’t.” His words were pained. ‘Never you, Angel.’ He reached for her hands, grasping them tightly in his own. “*Never* you.”

A tear finally slipped down her cheek. She understood better than he knew and heard his unspoken completion; he didn’t trust himself. “Promise me something, Anakin.”

“Anything.”

“Promise me you’ll never do it again.” Searching his gaze, Padmé held nothing back as she held his attention completely. “Promise me you’ll let our love, our future, be your strength and not your anger at your past.”

He gently kissed the backs of her knuckles and was silent for a long minute, searching the depths of her soul through the gaze she’d turned on him. Finally, his heart in his eyes, remorse for his actions clear, he gave his answer.

“I promise.”

Chapter 19

Chapter 19

“Padmé!” Cordé’s relieved greeting and enthusiastic hug on the landing pad were more than she’d expected. “Thank for the Force you’re safe; we were so worried!”

Padmé returned the joyful embrace, holding her friend tightly. “I’m alright, I promise. It’s good to be home.”

Cordé pulled back, her expression worried as she darted her gaze deliberately downward in question. Padmé managed to smile. “They’re fine. In fact, my abductors seem to have ensured everyone knows that particular tidbit.”

Cordé’s gaze flew to where Anakin stood behind his wife and her gaze grew sad. “Oh, Padmé — I’m so sorry!”

“Don’t be.” She replied, meaning every word. “It’s in the open now so we no longer have to live a lie.”

“But—”

Padmé shook her head, cutting Cordé off. “For better or worse the choice to return was mine, Cordé. I learned things the council needs to know about. I also learned...” she cast a look back at Anakin and Obi-Wan who were arguing in hushed tones in the shadows of the shuttle’s ramp. “I also learned that they can’t take my babies from me if I choose to keep them, despite their possible abilities.”

“What about Anakin?” Padmé knew her face must have shown her concern because Cordé pulled her into a tight hug. “*I am* sorry, Padmé. I hope things go the way you want them to.”

“Me too.”

“Now.” Cordé pulled back. “I see you’ve not had a change of clothes or a bath in several days. That can’t be good for the twins. We’ll just get you cleaned up, fed and you’ll feel a hundred times better.”

“The Council has said—”

Cordé shot Obi-Wan a dark look as he dared to interrupt, apparently finished with his former Padawan. “She’s pregnant and recovering from the shock of her captivity, Master Kenobi.” Padmé’s eyebrows rose as Cordé’s tone became icy and uncompromising, staring at her friend with a new-found respect; few would dare speak to a Jedi, especially one as well known as Obi-Wan, in that manner. “As the resident head physician until Doctor Naberrie’s official return I’m *prescribing* a bath or shower, hot food and a few hours of sleep. Your precious council will just have to wait a few more hours to get their hands on her twins!”

Anakin chuckled darkly. “Listen to her, Obi-Wan. I think she might be tempted to skewer you on your own lightsaber if you don’t.”

“But, the council—”

“*Can wait.* End of discussion.”

Cordé hustled Padmé off, leaving behind a shocked Obi-Wan and an amused Anakin. And she was as good as her word. Allowing Padmé the privacy of a shower — Cordé had decided that a bath could wait until Padmé wanted to soak later — with real water, Padmé could hear her friend bustling about her room. Smiling bemusedly, her eyes closed, the water poured down over her distended body. It was warm, the first warmth she’d felt outside her husband’s embrace since her captivity, and Padmé took her time.

When she emerged, wrapped in a cloth robe, her feet encased in comfortable slippers, Cordé was gone, but Lana was waiting for her. Ushered into the comfortable chair that had been placed by her work station, Lana crouched before her, gently parting the robe to slip an instrument inside and against her abdomen.

Padmé watched as her neo-natal expert carefully took readings on the health of the twins with her instruments and, with a grin, finally looked up.

“Would you like to hear their hearts beat?”

“Really?”

Lana nodded, flicking a switch on the instrument. Two steady heart beats, working counterpoint one another as if to fill the void of noiselessness, were clearly audible and Padmé gasped. Her babies. Her babies heart filled her eyes, her throat closing as she opened her mouth to thank her friend and—

“It’s the most beautiful sound I’ve ever heard.”

Lana whirled, the instrument falling away from Padmé’s stomach. “Jedi Skywalker!”

“It’s alright Lana.” Padmé placed a hand on her friend’s shoulder, smiling through her tears. “Anakin’s their father; and my husband.”

Lana blinked as if she’d been sucker punched, looking from where Anakin was gazing at Padmé tenderly to where Padmé’s soft smile was all for him. Everything fell into place; Padmé saw the pieces click and Lana began to laugh.

“You two... are very, very sneaky. Or careless if you intended to keep this marriage a secret.”

“It had to come out sometime.” Padmé extended her hand to Anakin and he joined her, grasping her fingers in his. “We always intended to have children.”

“Just not in the middle of a galactic war.” Anakin amended. He squeezed her fingers back. “How are you feeling?”

“Better.” Padmé didn’t even notice when Lana took her leave, the door closing with a soft click behind her. “Tired, actually. You?”

“Bone weary.” But his smile never changed. “Think we can convince the council to wait until tomorrow?”

Padmé opened her mouth to respond but was interrupted by a yawn. Her eyes widened and heat rose in her cheeks. “They may not have much choice.”

“We’ll make them wait then.” Anakin bent, sweeping her into his arms and dropping a gentle kiss on her lips. “My wife needs her rest if she’s going to be of any use to anyone.”

“All I do is sleep.”

He nuzzled her ear through the cloud of her hair as he placed her gently on the bed, bracing himself above her on his forearms. “Then that’s what your body needs, my love. The council can wait. Cordé sent a note while you were cleaning up to Master Windu informing him, and the council, that their meeting would have to wait until morning.”

She swallowed hard. “Will you be expelled?”

“I don’t know.”

“Then this could be your last night as a Jedi.”

“It’s possible.” He couldn’t hide the pain at that admission, didn’t try as she watched him.

“Oh, Anakin; all we wanted was to be happy. How did things get so out of control?”

He settled onto the bed next to her, gathering her into his arms and gently placing a kiss on her forehead. “You’re exhausted and not thinking straight, Padmé. Let’s not borrow trouble, alright? Sleep; you’ll feel better in the morning.”

He must have added a Force suggestion because the next thing she remembered it was morning and it proved him a liar.

Padmé woke anxious and nervous and determined that the Jedi wouldn’t ruin her life. Oh no. If they thought she was going to give up either her children or her husband, they were going to have a fight on their hands!

Chapter 20

Chapter 20

Smoothing down the front of the no-nonsense maternity suit Cordé had managed to find for her and having added one of her lab coats to complete the outfit, Padmé took a deep breath. Dressed in clothing she would feel comfortable working in and squaring her shoulders, she stepped up to the main doors leading into the Council's chamber. The doors opened and she waited, patiently, slipping one hand into the lab coat pocket.

Anakin was nowhere to be seen and Padmé felt a sinking feeling start in her gut. Had they expelled him? Forbidden him to see her? Had he even seen them yet? She forced her heart rate to calm, taking another deep breath as she stopped the wild run of her thoughts.

She was a doctor; it was high time she started thinking like one!

With sure but slow steps she entered the Council Chamber. There was an immediate sense of being looked at with disapproving eyes and she straightened, her swollen belly proudly leading the way into the room. She'd made no efforts to hide it; at the stage she was in it would have been futile anyway. Stopping, Padmé placed her still visible hand on the curve of her belly, gently rubbing to sooth the twins; they could no doubt *feel* the animosity directed at her. She didn't wait for any of the eight Masters present to speak; she focused on one and then another, her words calm as she took control of the meeting from the outset. "I would appreciate if you would all control yourselves; you're disturbing the twins with your disapproval."

The Jedi Masters, as one, jerked as if pulled on strings and Padmé took over the conversation immediately, giving no one a chance to voice their opinions. "As you all know, I was held captive by General Grievous for over a month. Six weeks to be exact. During that time I was exposed to a minimal knowledge of their fleet, inner workings and their membership. I was not permitted to attend their meetings, but was checked regularly to ensure that my twins were in good health. I was permitted no contact with the outside barring one transmission. The Chancellor Palpatine was *permitted* to contact me. It was shortly after this that I discovered he was the Master Grievous spoke of the last time he encountered Obi-Wan and Anakin."

Any animosity that had been coming off the council disappeared to be replaced by shock. Padmé managed not to smile. So far, so good. "I also learned that he is aware of my condition and that I am carrying twins. Jedi Twins. Anakin is their father."

"Skywalker!"

"Outrageous!"

"Expel him!"

Padmé pinned each of the outspoken Masters with a cold look. She was in no mood to deal with their petty dislike of her husband. "Perhaps if you can stop calling for his blood, I will

explain to you the ulterior motive behind my capture.”

The Masters fell silent and Padmé noted for the first time that many of the Masters she was used to were gone, replaced with younger, more inexperienced Jedi. Her heart contracted painfully. There’d been more losses, irreversible losses, in her absence.

“Thank you. Before you cast Anakin out, I would ask that you consider this. He is whom the Chancellor is after. Palpatine is a Sith Lord in search of an apprentice and has his sights set on Anakin — or his children. Separating us now would surely mean disaster for one party or both.”

Mace and Yoda, who had remained silent through much of her speech, exchanged looks. Shaak Ti and Ki-Adi-Mundi did the same, but it was Shaak Ti who addressed her. “Attachments are forbidden to Jedi, Doctor Naberrie. What you have us do? Allow Jedi Skywalker to walk away unpunished?”

“What do you suggest for punishment, Master?” Padmé smiled faintly. “Exile? Banishment? Solitary reflection? I know all of these are used to some extent and I know, and he knew, what the consequences would be when we set out on this path. But things are not black and white. Anakin is not the only Jedi with ‘attachments’ — several of you Masters have done the same.”

“Accusations without grounds these are, Doctor. Overstep your bounds, do you.”

Padmé turned to Yoda and smiled again. “Do I? Ki-Adi-Mundi has six wives and several children. Surely he would act if they were in danger.”

“As he would act to save any innocent.”

Padmé rounded on Mace. “Then what do you call this attachment you have to me, Master Windu?”

“I have no—”

“Spare me!” Padmé’s tone was scathing. “What you’ve done since I saved your life is beyond acquittal or gratitude. You’ve taken an interest, a *fatherly* interest in my well being. You’ve made it a point to see that I get the supplies and medicines I need to make my life easier. *You’re* the reason I have a new operating theatre and my friends as help.”

Yoda looked at his colleagues speculatively. “A point does the Doctor make. Attached we have become.”

Padmé looked squarely at Yoda. “Is that such a bad thing?”

The little green alien returned her look calmly. “To other emotions attachment can lead. Fear. Anger. Jealousy. A temptation it is, to an inexperienced mind.”

“Fear mongering among Jedi?” Padmé returned mildly. “Don’t you think if you focused on hope, love and forgiveness, attachments wouldn’t seem so bad? That, perhaps, more strength could be gained from those attachments than weakness?”

“No guarantees there are. Dangerous attachments can be.”

“But rewarding as well.”

“Attempting to keep your Jedi lover and your children, Doctor?” Shaak Ti’s tone was mild.

Padmé didn’t spare the Togrutan Jedi Master a glance. “Anakin has known his mother. He has known love of the likes the rest of you will never understand. He is not a typical Jedi. You’ve all been blinded by centuries of order and law that you can’t see not everyone will fit into your mold. Anakin draws strength from his attachments. They fuel his desire to accomplish his goals and his determination not to fail. I once said to this council that its rulings were fair. Perhaps I was wrong if it cannot accept diversity within its own ranks!”

“Something to add have you, Jedi Skywalker?”

Padmé turned, meeting his gaze, and she saw admiration shining from their depths. She didn’t know how long he’d been standing in the doorway, but his presence didn’t make any difference to her convictions. Padmé’d have said her piece if he’d been present from the beginning even if she’d been aware of it. That didn’t mean she was ungrateful for his physical presence, however.

Anakin strode to the center of the chamber to stand next to her, bowing respectfully to the Masters. “Only that she is right, Masters. I am not ashamed of my love for Padmé, but I am humbled by hers for me.”

“Do you think yourself deserving?”

“No, Master Windu. I am simply thankful she chose me.” His answering smile was faint. “I was not called before this council to hash out my private life, much as I am enjoying myself. I was called to discuss a plan of action to be taken regarding the Sith Lord — whom we now know is the Chancellor.”

“Obi-Wan has set it in motion.” Ki-Adi-Mundi told him evenly. “Your circumstances change things.”

“I don’t see how Master.” Anakin’s tone was almost casual, but still respectful. “Have any of you had any complaints as to my performance, barring your knowledge of this transgression?”

There was a murmur of discussion as the Masters conversed.

Mace was the one who answered. “There have been several concerns voiced about how hard you push yourself, Anakin and at your reckless behavior.”

“But nothing recently; since I was Knighted?”

There was a pregnant pause.

“No.” Mace agreed reluctantly.

“It might interest you to know Master Windu that shortly after Padmé was exonerated for all charges by the syndicate, I married her.” There was silence in the room as he dropped the bomb, taking Padmé’s hand in his and squeezing it. Anakin continued and Padmé could tell he was keeping himself under tight reign. “*Padmé* has given me a reason to shape up, a hope to come home to and a reason to fight beyond believing in our cause. She is my strength and without her I *would not be* the Jedi I am today.”

“Problems this cause, Jedi Skywalker.”

Anakin smiled faintly. “For the council, perhaps. I don’t see how. My performance and record have been nothing but exemplary, barring an instance or two, in the last five years. I don’t see how you can say it creates complications. I should think it would eliminate them.”

“Neither here nor there.” Mace’s words were still reluctant but Padmé could detect a note of admiration. “According to Doctor Naberrie, the Chancellor Palpatine is a Sith Lord — with you in mind for his next apprentice. Your attachment to Padmé makes her the logical target if he’s attempting to turn you.”

“So we strike first.”

“Knowledge and Defense, the ways of the Jedi. Not aggression.”

“A preemptive strike would be considered defensive, Master Yoda.” Padmé found herself saying. “Doesn’t it make more sense to confront the Chancellor before he can do further damage? He’s already pushed the galaxy into a civil war.”

“Hear his side, should we not, Doctor?”

“Respectfully,” Padmé’s lips thinned into a firm line, her hand curling protectively over her stomach, “no, Master Yoda. The man had me captured, imprisoned, deliberately leaked the information about my children to the Jedi likely in an effort to cause the very thing you’re considering. You’re playing right into his hands by standing back and observing. He needs to be eliminated and quickly.”

“The Doctor has a point.” Mace interjected, much to everyone’s visible surprise. “The Chancellor is a threat and one we neither saw nor expected. He needs to be removed from office immediately. The indiscretion by Jedi Skywalker and the Doctor must wait until such a time as the threat is eliminated. Or the children born and sent into hiding.”

Padmé clutched Anakin’s hand. Sent into hiding? Dear Force!

Anakin’s hand was solid and firm in her own; reassuring. “Since it’s me the Chancellor is after, I make the perfect bait and one he won’t be able to resist.”

“Anakin, *no!*”

He glanced at her and offered a smile that didn’t quite reach his eyes. “We need to end this quickly, Padmé, or he’ll come after you again.” He turned back to look at the Masters. “My plan is bold, daring and a touch reckless — but I have every intention of returning alive. Will you listen?”

The Masters spoke in hushed tones for several minutes before dismissing Padmé. Fear knotted her stomach as she was forced to move from the chamber, her eyes on Anakin’s. His begged her to trust him. And she did, with every fiber of her being. Even so, she couldn’t help but feel that, this time, he’d taken up more than he could handle.

Chapter 21

Chapter 21

The waiting was the worst.

It had been two weeks since her return to the Temple. Two weeks since her conversation with the Masters. Two weeks since Anakin's plan had been presented and then approved — or so he'd informed her. It also meant it was two weeks since she'd last seen him and her heart was heavy with worry.

Today was the day they'd set to confront the Chancellor and end the war one way or another.

Padmé had been confined to her bed by Lana that morning when pains across her abdomen began making themselves known. Lana checked in on her frequently and Cordé didn't leave her side as the contractions came and went throughout the afternoon. Lana, a knowing sparkle in her eye, informed her that soon, very soon, she was going to be a mother.

The twins were on the way.

A flash of blue and green light intermingled with red.

Padmé tossed her head, sweat having plastered the strands of her hair to her forehead as she bore down. She'd been in a labor for over sixteen hours and the twins were quickly rushing towards the world and an uncertain future.

But, beyond her babies, Padmé was only semi-conscious of the fact that her body was laboring to deliver them. Her mind was elsewhere, caught up in a by-play she neither knew nor cared where it came from. A by-play that had the potential to change the galaxy forever...

"You're a fool, Kenobi." The Chancellor's voice was a hiss. "And you're too late. Skywalker is mine."

Obi-Wan held his ground, staring at the man they'd come to identify as a Sith Lord. "It is you who are too late, Palpatine. Stand down. Release your hold on the Courts and the Senate, and we will ensure you get a fair trial."

The Chancellor's familiar features twisted into a mask of haughty arrogance even as he laughed manically. At Kenobi's feet lay Asajj Ventress, skillfully dispatched by the Jedi Master's hand. But, around them lay the bodies of several other Masters who had fallen prey to Asajj's quick blades and cunning skill.

And to treachery.

Asajj had lured and baited several of them close to her new Master, only to have the red blade of the Sith flash out and end the lives in the blink of an eye.

“You dream, Kenobi. Lay down your weapon and I won’t have Anakin kill you.”

Padmé shook her head in mute denial, feeling like a spectator at a professional opera — but one she didn’t have the full script to. *This isn’t the plan!* She wanted to scream. Obi-Wan was supposed to wait to confront the Chancellor with Anakin, not try and take him on his own!

Obi-Wan’s shoulders straightened and he pulled himself to his full height. The door behind him hissed open and Mace, Yoda and Kit Fisto stepped in, their blades at the ready.

The Chancellor laughed. “Good! Good! You’re all on schedule. Lord Vader.”

A cloaked figure stepped from the shadows, burning yellow eyes the only visible portion of them and stopped at Palpatine’s shoulder.

A figure that was as familiar to her as the swell of her pregnant belly. Padmé knew on some level she was having trouble breathing. That the breath had lodged in her throat and was making it difficult for her to breathe. Distantly she heard Lana’s instruction, could feel the pain of stretching tendons and muscles, but didn’t register. It was like a bad dream, but a dream she couldn’t wake up from as the images, the drama, unfolded...

The Chancellor looked at each of the Jedi in his chamber. “Lord Vader will welcome you properly.”

A blue blade flared to life in Vader’s hand and he waded in. He traded blows with Obi-Wan and Kit, the Force lending him speed and agility that, even in the dream-like state, was impossible to follow. Yoda and Mace moved beyond him, towards the Emperor, but Vader was quicker, stepping between them, one of Asajj’s blades leaping into his free hand as he spun, each hand moving independently as he traded blows with both Jedi Masters.

Palpatine’s laughter was delighted as he watched his new apprentice work. “Use your anger! Use your hate, Lord Vader. It has made you strong. Made you powerful! Not even the best of the Jedi order can stand against you now.”

Vader’s hood, for all his movements, never slid from his head as he traded blows with the four Jedi who now encircled him. The black cloak flared, swirling about the newly minted Dark Lord like a shadow of things to come. Kit Fisto was thrown backward first, careening into the wall by the door. Mace went next, a speedy kick sending him crashing into the desk.

And then, as he regained his feet, Vader slipped.

“NO!”

The word was torn from Padmé’s throat, but a whisper as she fought to keep breathing, her body contracting and heaving as she struggled to birth her children. Her heart was breaking as she finally understood what she was seeing. As the realization of Anakin’s broken promise shattered her reality.

“Anakin, no!”

“Padmé?”

Padmé heard her voice being called distantly, felt the cool cloth being placed against her forehead, and heard Lana’s delighted exclamation of, “It’s a boy!” but none of it registered.

The eyes she turned towards the friends at her bedside were blank, focused only on a vision they couldn't see...

Vader recovered quickly but was forced to give ground, backtracking towards Palpatine. The Sith Lord took up a defensive position in front of his Master. He didn't speak, hadn't spoken, and wouldn't. Palpatine was standing near one of the large bay windows, back lit by the artificial night, his expression menacing. "Give up, Master Yoda. You cannot hope to win. I will be merciful if you surrender your lightsabers now."

"Fair deals, the Sith do not make. Foolish to accept, it would be."

Obi-Wan lunged forward in that moment, catching the Chancellor off guard for a split second. Vader was there, intercepting him, his blade flashing in tandem with Obi-Wan's, blocking, striking and defending the man. Obi-Wan pushed forward, putting Vader off balance only to have a blind strike from the side sweep in.

Palpatine's lightsaber blazed a path directly towards Obi-Wan's exposed neck from a distance that no regular mortal would have been able to avoid. But Obi-Wan, a Jedi Knight in his prime, dodged at the last moment, dropping to his belly in a movement that left his back prone to attack.

And Vader took the opportunity.

Padmé screamed as the lightsabers flashed, the vision exploding from behind her eyes and popping blood vessels and then, mercifully, things went black.

Chapter 22

Chapter 22

Beep.

Beep.

Beep.

Padmé woke slowly, groggily opening her eyes to find herself looking up into the concerned face of her best friend. Staring at her, confusion crowded her muddled brain. “Cordé?”

“Thank heavens!” Cordé’s smile was relieved. “I thought for a minute there that we were going to lose you for good. How do you feel?”

Turning that statement and question over in her head, Padmé responded honestly. “Fuzzy. My brain feels like it’s stuck in cotton batting. What happened?”

“We rolled you into the delivery room about ten hours into your labor.” Cordé explained, carefully examining Padmé’s expression for any signs of a relapse. ‘You became so disoriented you couldn’t even hold your babies when they were born.’ Padmé sat bolt-upright but Cordé placed firm hands on her shoulders and pressed her back down. “The children as in good health, Padmé.” Cordé told her gently. “But yours isn’t so good. You had a heart attack shortly after the baby girl was born.”

Heart attack? Padmé paled. What could have...? She frowned, her muddled mind trying to sort through the information, her memories hazy. “Did anything else happen?”

“You were asking for Anakin.” Cordé’s expression was solemn, her expression sad. “He couldn’t be here, but you kept saying his name.”

Padmé wondered if she was losing her mind and tried to shake off the irrational fear that accompanied Anakin’s name. “Can you blame me for wanting my husband around for the birth of his children? Where are they? I’d like to see them.”

Cordé waved to the door and Lana stepped in, Mik at her side, each cradling a tiny infant. Padmé drank in the sight of the twins with hungry eyes and outstretched her arms. “Let me hold them; please?”

Lana moved to the bed side, her smile soft as she explained the proper procedure for holding a pair of newborns. Positioning herself as instructed, Padmé held her arms out and Lana carefully laid the boy, a light patch of blonde hair already dusting the crown of his head, and then the girl — taken from Mik’s arms — into Padmé’s. The little girl had a tuft of darker colored hair. Padmé pulled them as close against her as she dared and dropped gentle kisses on each one, speaking their names to them for the first time. “Luke and Leia. My darling angels.”

Lana informed her that the twins were still undergoing certain care measures to ensure they weren't underdeveloped and whisked them away again after a few brief, too brief, minutes of loving. Padmé watched them go with tears in her eyes and a smile on her lips. Wishing she dared order Lana to bring them back, the *need* to know they were healthy warring with her need to hold them and keep them safe, she ungraciously bowed to Lana's expertise.

"Luke and Leia?"

"Anakin chose her name; he said it was only fair I name our son. I thought..." Padmé's return smile was almost self-conscious. "I met this woman on the transport to Tatooine who lost her baby. Lux didn't have a chance and I learned some valuable lessons from his death. Call it a... a thank you."

Cordé placed a hand on Padmé's shoulder and squeezed. "You don't have to explain it to me. Luke is a good fine name, no matter where you came by it."

Padmé settled back in her recovery bed, apprehension returning. "Have the Jedi returned from their mission with the Chancellor?"

"Not yet." Squeezing, her friend tried to convey comfort and support Padmé just couldn't bring herself to accept. "I'm sure things are going just fine, Doc. Don't worry, they'll be back sooner than you think."

Padmé was dozing lightly when the sound of the door opening brought her to full wakefulness.

It was dark outside her room, indicating it was late, and she squinted against the glare. "Who's there?" There was a sound, a sound that sent chills through her blood, and then nothing. The door closed again and her heart leapt into her throat. Her hand slammed down on the comm. unit built into the bed. "Lana!"

The line crackled for half a second before Padmé tried again. "Lana!"

"I'm here, Doctor." Was the sleepy reply. *"Is something wrong?"*

"The children! They're after the children!"

"The children?" Lana's voice was gaining strength. *"Who's after the child-?"* She stopped, and Padmé heard her turn away from the unit, but it hadn't been shut off. *"I'm sorry, sir, but this area is off limits and restricted to medical personnel only."*

The laughter than floated back through the comm. line made Padmé's blood turn to ice in her veins. "Oh, Force, get out of there, Lana!"

Lana's voice came back over the comm. *"Sir, I really must ask you to leave, interfere—urk!"*

"Lana?" Padmé heard a sickening sound, like someone's trachea being crushed. "Lana? Answer me!"

The wet, sickening thump of a body hitting the floor had Padmé throwing back the covers. A distorted voice came back over the comm. line. *"We'll take good care of them, Doctor."*

"No!" Padmé's feet hit the ground. She felt the sharp, stabbing pains through her body, but adrenaline was coursing through it too, and lent her strength. Flying through the hallway, down two doors to the nursery, Padmé flung the door open with a violent heave.

Crying.

"Thank the Force." Padmé scrambled to the crib and looked down into it. A smile softened her face for an instant as she caught sight of both babies still safely tucked into the ensemble. She whirled, a dark presence making itself known, and faced the slightly hunched, stooped figure standing in the doorway. Malevolent energy radiated off him like a beacon. Padmé planted herself in front of the crib, spreading her arms protectively. "You can't have them."

"There is nothing you can do to stop me." A voice she recognized instantly informed her. "They are mind to take."

"Never." Padmé settled herself into one of the defensive postures Anakin had taught her. "They'll never be yours."

A dark puddle on the ground caught Padmé's eye even as the figure began to laugh, one hand pressed close to its side. Padmé recognized the sheen of the liquid instantly. Blood. He was bleeding. The thought didn't help her in the next instant as she was suddenly being lifted from the ground by an invisible hand, struggling to breathe.

"I think you'll find you have no choice in the matter, my dear."

Padmé clawed at her neck as she struggled to breathe, struggled to throw off the invisible hand that was slowly, agonizingly, crushing her wind pipe. Her brain, slowly being starved for oxygen, sharpened into hard focus and the events of the visions she'd seen while in labor rushed back.

The Jedi confronting Palpatine.

Obi-Wan fighting Vader.

Vader; her Anakin.

Anakin's broken promise.

The blades arcing towards Obi-Wan's unprotected back.

"Leave her alone!"

Obi-Wan! The thought rushed through her mind. Impossible! She'd seen him die — hadn't she?

Her vision was starting to darken, the edges going black. She could hear the wail of the twins, frightened by the darkness that was encircling their mother. Padmé fought it, but couldn't pry the invisible fingers from her neck. In that moment of clarity she knew she hadn't seen Obi-Wan die, just assumed that he had — by Anakin's hand.

Blue light blazed to life in front of her gaze and the pressure on her throat instantly released. She collapsed back to the floor, coughing and gasping as she sucked in lung-fulls of

fresh air.

Obi-Wan had her attacker cornered, green lightsaber versus blue, but there was little the seriously injured darkness could do. Padmé saw it. She read it in his body language and then screamed as Obi-Wan was suddenly engulfed in a stream of blue force lightening. The lightning lit the nursery with eerie blue light.

It wasn't Anakin.

She almost collapsed as the lightning illuminated the face of the man who had held her captive for well over a month. Obi-Wan let out a howl of pain as the lightning slammed into him from point blank range. Padmé looked at him helplessly. There was nothing she could do, nothing she could say, that would distract the Sith Lord from his objectives, was there? Did she dare turn that deadly looking storm on herself and potentially the twins?

Before she could act, another lightsaber cut through the darkness, catching the lightning on a blue blade; one that reflected off sapphire eyes of a matching shade.

"Anakin!"

Anakin stepped in and intercepted the lightning bolts on his lightsaber. It gave Obi-Wan a chance to collect himself. Then, to Padmé's amazement, Anakin lunged forward, bodily slamming the Sith into the wall. Lightning raced down Anakin's form for a half a second before Palpatine's head snapped back into the wall, breaking his concentration. Palpatine recovered and, faced with both Anakin and Obi-Wan, fled. Running at a half-jog, the older man turned stumbled as he turned a corner, Anakin hot on his heels.

The sound of lightsabers was audible for a split second and followed by a scream.

A death scream.

An explosion of blue-white energy ripped through the medical wing and threw Padmé against the side of the crib. Anakin was at her side instantly, his hands out stretched, and his face taut as he used the Force to shield her and the twins from the massive surge of Force energy that threatened to destroy the medical bay.

Joining them, his robes still smoking, Obi-Wan lent his strength to Anakin's. Padmé picked the twins up from the crib, holding one carefully in each arm, and stepped closer to Anakin. His arms enfolded her, narrowing the point of energy dissipation. Obi-Wan did the same, clasping Anakin's shoulders as they fought through the maelstrom together.

It was over in an instant, the surge of wild Force energy retreating back towards the vessel that had released it and leaving behind a nursery, living quarters and operating arena all open to the same area. The walls had been obliterated, the fixtures twisted and bent; the objects that hadn't been secured down were littered every which way.

Anakin finally released Obi-Wan and Obi-Wan did the same as Padmé sank to her knees cradling the twins. The reality of the situation sank in as the adrenaline bled away. The attack. The cost. What had almost... Anakin crouched next to her, enfolding her in his arms and gently stroking her hair as he kissed her temple. His gaze met hers as he carefully rubbed the tuft of hair on each of the twin's heads, a hint of wonder in his serious gaze, an invisible weight lifted from his shoulders.

Palpatine was gone.

Chapter 23

Chapter 23

"Agree with you, *I* do not," Yoda told them firmly. "Become reckless and dangerous this path has. Contradict the Jedi code, it does."

Obi-Wan folded his hands inside the sleeves of his robes. "With all due respect, Master Yoda, Anakin has earned this. He has proven that the prophecy is true. He destroyed the Sith. Doesn't that earn some special dispensation?"

"He destroyed them by pretending to be one of them, Obi-Wan." Mace's admonishment was firm. "That is not the way of the Jedi."

"Perhaps not, Master Windu," Obi-Wan conceded easily. "But a Jedi's path is never easy and never set in stone. Anakin has earned the rank of Master and with it the privileges of that rank. The Doctor has saved more Jedi than any pair of Masters combined. She has proven a capable and able fighter. The war has tarnished the image of the Jedi; we must regain the trust of the people if we hope to survive as an order. Allowing Anakin and Padmé's marriage to not only become public but blessed by the Council would go a long way to ensuring the empathy of those who believe we have no more feeling than the clones!"

"Dangerous this is, Obi-Wan." Yoda admonished. "Done before, it has not been."

"Perhaps then it is time it has been, Master." Obi-Wan looked at each of the Masters in the council chamber with him. "Granting the permission to marry to a Master doesn't seem like such a stretch — not when most of the council already has set the precedent."

Padmé watched with a kind of speechless fascination as Obi-Wan skillfully maneuvered the council into the position he wanted them in. He was good, very good. No wonder he'd been nick-named the Negotiator. Since her encounter with the Sith Lord two days prior, she'd been moved into Anakin's small rooms, the twins with her until the council made their decision one way or another. Mik had taken Lana's body back to her family, and Cordé had opted to shoulder the task of rebuilding their facilities.

It left Padmé time to recuperate from the attack and enjoy being coddled by Anakin. It also allowed *them* time to bond with their children.

Obi-Wan had informed them of this council meeting, with the request to allow him to do the talking and to trust him. After the meeting with the Sith Lord, and the vision they'd explained as Anakin's reckless plan to kill Palpatine by pretending to turn to the dark side, she was more forgiving towards the stern Jedi Master. He'd more than made up for any of the strikes she'd previously held against him.

Of course, they hadn't been able to completely explain the way she'd seen the confrontation. Obi-Wan's best guess had been that her connection to Anakin, and her bond to him through the Force Sensitive twins, had given her a Force vision at the very moment the

twins had been being born. She'd glimpsed the very part of the plan that Anakin hadn't wanted her to see.

Padmé smiled fondly, remembering Anakin's embarrassment and contrite behavior following that particular revelation. She'd never seen him be more solicitous — especially since Palpatine had come after her when it was all said and done.

She waited patiently while the council debated Obi-Wan's request. Shala, the Twi'lek apprentice of Shaak Ti, had begged permission to watch the twins. Not wanting to disturb the Masters, Padmé had agreed — on the condition the twins were kept just outside the council chamber. Shala had been delighted.

The Masters finally fell silent once more and Yoda's disapproving look encompassed them all. Mace was the one who spoke for them. "Jedi Skywalker."

Anakin stood and Padmé squeezed his hand briefly as he did. He didn't look at her, but she didn't need to see his face to know he would accept the council's ruling. If he was thrown out, they'd already spoken of finding a ship and going to visit his mother and then her own family. He was handy enough he'd never be lacking for work no matter where they went. With her own skills, it would mean an adjustment to what they were used to, but they'd survive. They'd be together and that was the most important thing; a family.

"Yes, Master?"

"This council confers on you the rank of Master. A seat on this council is vacant and it is not a responsibility to take lightly. We offer it to you, if you so wish it."

Anakin bowed and Padmé felt her chest swell with pride. He'd made it! But his next words shocked her. "I'm afraid I cannot accept the seat on the council. I'm humbled and honored to be granted the rank of Master, but my family must come before the Jedi. We are willing to cooperate with the tour Master Obi-Wan suggested on the condition Naboo and Tatooine are included as stop points."

"Attachments—"

"Are forbidden," Anakin grinned, cutting off the familiar rhetoric. "In this case, attachments may have saved the galaxy."

There was little they could say in response to that and everyone knew it.

It was only because of Anakin's deep attachment to his wife and children that had allowed him to take the steps necessary to destroy the Sith instead of potentially joining them. Little did the council realize how close he'd actually come, but Anakin had confided in Padmé at her words on their way back to Coruscant from Korriban had inspired him even as they'd chastised. Using their love as a shield to guard the very core and fiber of his being, he's hatched the dangerous plan.

She couldn't very well be angry with him for that!

Obi-Wan spoke again before Padmé could voice the thoughts swimming through her head. "We must come to a consensus, Master." He spoke gently, filling the silence with the even modulated tones of his voice. "Master Skywalker has saved not only the Senate and the Republic, but the galaxy from the tyranny of a Sith Lord with absolute power."

Padmé winced even as she noted the flush Anakin was trying to keep from his face. When put that way, especially by Obi-Wan, it was a sound argument — and one the council members weren't going to dispute.

"What seek you, Master Obi-Wan?" Yoda's response was weary, as if defeated by greater logic.

"I believe it is not what I seek, Master Yoda, but what Padmé and Anakin seek. They wish to continue as they have, with Padmé as the temple's head physician and Anakin as a Master."

"Then it is settled." Mace told him, pleased. "There is nothing wrong with those arrangements."

"They also want to raise their children here in the Temple," Obi-Wan's lips twitched. "Together as a family."

The stunned silence that greeted the bomb had Padmé biting the inside of her lip to withhold a grin. The Masters exchanged looks. Obi-Wan's maneuvering had placed them in a very difficult position. To deny the Chosen One and his wife this small request would be unheard of with what they had risked to defeat the Sith. But the code forbade it. She knew, before any Master spoke, that they would fall back on it.

Mace didn't disappoint her. "The code forbids it. We are willing to overlook Anakin's attachment to his wife in gratitude for both of their service. But the children belong in the crèche with the rest of the younglings."

"Never." Padmé spoke the word calmly, but inside she was shaking. They were *not* going to take her babies. "I'll leave Coruscant before you can do that."

"An honor it is, Doctor, to have a child in the order."

Padmé regarded Master Yoda stonily. "I will allow my children to be trained in the Jedi ways only under my conditions. Anakin and I have sacrificed more than any of you will ever know or understand to be able to be where we are today. I *will not* let you take my babies and place them in that unfeeling place you call a crèche! Anakin was brought up by his mother; so will my children be. When they reach the same age Anakin was when he began his training, I will *consider* allowing them to join the Jedi."

"Unacceptable."

Padmé made to rise to her feet at the single word from Shaak Ti, but Obi-Wan's response to it brought her up short.

"How is that condition unacceptable, Master?" His tone was still mild, but there was no mistaking the flint behind it. "Anakin was brought up by his mother. He is the Chosen One and none of you doubt it anymore. He has accomplished more than any Jedi precisely *because* he is not your typical Jedi."

"A dangerous line do you walk, Obi-Wan."

"And willingly, Master Yoda." Obi-Wan returned. "Anakin and Padmé have more than earned this chance. If you'll simply agree to my idea of a tour, they can have the time to think over their options. Time they have not had until now. They may well decide that two Force Sensitive children do indeed belong in the crèche!"

Padmé almost stepped in to say he was wrong but Anakin's warning hand on her arm kept her in check. Dissuading the possibility from the minds of the Masters would only ensure they wouldn't allow anything of the sort. Slowly, one by one, the Masters yielded to Obi-Wan's logic until Yoda remained the only dissenting voice.

Mace turned to face Anakin. "A majority has been reached. We agree to this so-called tour. Use the time to consider your options carefully for when you return, we will need to meet again."

"The council is wise." Anakin smiled slightly. "You'll have our answer upon our return. Good day, Masters. May the Force be with you."

Accepting Anakin's hand, Padmé rose to her feet and accompanied him out of the council chamber. she waited until the doors closed behind them. "What was *that* supposed to mean?"

He grinned. "It means, my sweet, that we are going to go on an extended tour. You and I will have to smile for the holo-cams and show that the Jedi are in fact capable of love the way normal people are." He turned, dragging her into his arms in the same motion and his grin turned devilish. "It also means more alone time, just you and me."

"And the twins?"

"And the twins," he agreed softly, smiling down at her.

Padmé couldn't think of anything else that sounded like heaven.

Chapter 24

Epilogue

Over the next five years, Anakin and Padmé toured to major cities and planets, giving guests talks and playing a dutifully married couple. Little did those who followed them so avidly realize, but there was no acting involved. Anakin played the smitten husband because he was smitten. He proclaimed often that he loved her more by the day, and proved it in the way he not only adored her but their twins.

The twins were kept from the public eye as much as possible, though the media was well aware of their existence — and of Anakin's fierce protection of them. No one, after the first attempt in their first year of touring, attempted to ask for holos of the children. Anakin had crushed the holo-lens with barely a thought and flatly told them, on live-holo feed, that anyone caught attempting to take holos of his children would be dealt with swiftly and without mercy.

It had caused an uproar when he'd proceeded to say he'd then let his wife deal with them.

As a couple, Anakin and Padmé were much loved by the people they visited. Many remembered the Naboo fiasco with the Trade Federation and would listen to them simply because of Padmé's part as the beleaguered Monarch. Those who came to watch out of sympathy, stayed because of the honesty they projected so easily.

They took two years off.

One to stay with the Lars family on Tatooine, where Anakin was reunited with his mother and introduced to his step family. The other was spent on Naboo with Padmé's parents. Neither family wished for them to leave, but their year-long hiatus each time had given them time to bond and grow with their twins.

Luke was shy, the quiet one, and trailed after his father whenever he could. Leia was outspoken and unafraid of anything. She trailed after Padmé, constantly asking questions about every subject imaginable.

When the time came for them to return to Coruscant, Padmé flatly told Anakin, with one hand in each of the twin's, that they would be given the choice when they were old enough to understand what being a Jedi was all about.

They returned to Coruscant to find a very different Jedi Order.

Under public pressure, with Mon Mothma having been surprisingly voted in as the New Chancellor, the Jedi order had been given an ultimatum. It had to produce one child for every child it took to be trained. If the child born to the temple was not Force Sensitive, they would give that child to the parents of the child which they had taken. If they did not agree to the condition, there would be no more children to add to their crèche.

Padmé and Anakin were welcomed home with open arms to a council who needed not only advice, but ideas. Anakin was given his place on the council as Padmé resumed her

duties as the Temple's head physician. She placed the children in the crèche during the day so they would be competently watched and trained and ensured they slept at home during the night.

Luke and Leia were delighted with the new arrangement which gave them a multitude of new playmates.

Over the following months Anakin convinced the council to not only acquiesce, but to allow the nominal emotional attachment between mother and child. He worked tirelessly, eventually — with Obi-Wan's assistance — winning Yoda over. If Yoda didn't share his beliefs, he now wisely held his tongue. With Anakin's influence, the face of the Jedi had begun changing and the older, more reserved Jedi were powerless to stop it.

Several months after Anakin and Padmé's return, Cordé announced that she and Obi-Wan had come to an agreement. The shock of that revelation was felt throughout the temple. Anakin and Padmé simply shared a smile and a soft laugh and wished them the same happiness they had found.

But that, my friends, is as they say, another tale for another day...

Fin

Author's Notes: Wow, end of the duology :D And I think that's it for me on this one. Padmé as a Doctor was great fun — I may have to revisit it sometime [probably not, but you never know ;)]. Thank you for reading everyone; you've been such loyal, wonderful readers! You've been just awesome!

On that note — YES! I did end it the same way as the first one deliberately. But I won't be writing Cordé and Obi-Wan's tale. Mostly because no bunnies are biting, but in this case, it's simply too much fun to contemplate without giving details!